

CHILAKAMARTI LAKSHMI NARASIMHAM

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

CHILAKAMARTI LAKSHMI NARASIMHAM

BY
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To
The departed soul of
C.V. DIKSHITULU

whose erudition and affection
inspired me to make further studies
in the laws of literature

V.V.L.N. Rao

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Foreword

The world is wide. So is the world of writers.

It is in the fitness of things to introduce to the wider world the life and works of Chilakamarti Lakshmi Narasimham (1867-1946) an outstanding Telugu writer and a follower of Kandukuri Veeresalingam (1848-1919).

Chilakamarti made a significant contribution to Telugu literature and the society as a patriot, poet, play-wright, novelist, biographer, autobiographer, journalist and social reformer, though he was blind like John Milton.

In my critical assessment of Chilakamarti's works, I have projected his multifaceted personality and achievements of abiding value without going into ecstasy or exaggeration, keeping in view the limitations of a biographer.

Care has been taken to identify the incidental relevance of his works to the present day problems as also his universal message for all times since the very purpose of literature is to guide mankind in its quest for extreme bliss through unity in diversity.

Of the many books I consulted to write this monograph, the two books - *Kandukuri Veeresalingam*, a monograph in English by D. Anjaneyulu writer of repute and *Chilkamarti Sahitya Seva* (Service of Chilakamarti to Literature) a treatise in Telugu by M. Bharali deserve special mention.

Further, I acknowledge the services of I.V. Chalapati Rao an educationist and biographer in English who kindly perused the script and suggested a few alterations in the languages.

I should render my thanks to the authorities of the Sahitya Akademi for their goodwill and courtesy in entrusting me the pleasant job of writing this monograph.

I owe my thanks to the Akademi reviewer, D. Ramalingam who made a few suggestions, keeping in view the general readers.

My labours and literary endeavours in this regard, I feel, will be rewarded if the general readers who have no direct access to the works of Chilakamarti are better benefited by this monograph.

- V.V.L.N. Rao

CHAPTER-I

THE NEW ERA

It is an established fact that the British rule in India marked a sharp break with the past and the beginning of a new era in the cultural history of India. The modern intellectuals played an important role in the rise of Indian nationalism and cultural renaissance. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, scholars and reformers like Raja Ramamohun Roy endeavoured to identify the causes for the deterioration in the cultural life of the country. The internal bickerings and weaknesses in the social, economic and political set-up of the country appeared to have been responsible for the deterioration.

Patriotism also required to have a new look while dealing with the foreign rulers. Though the freedom fighters condemned the foreign rule, they did not hesitate to appreciate the individual merits of the rulers. This, in fact, was a new attitude developed amongst the Indian patriots.

The British rulers, of course, tried their best to establish a sort of administrative stability utilising the services of educated younger generations; but in their anxiety to do so, they betrayed themselves through their misdeeds. The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed a few of such misdeeds.

In the year 1905 Bengal was divided into two. The people raised their voice against it in such a way that the rest of the country fell in line with them. In fact the whole country began to condemn the misdeeds of the rulers by holding public meetings. To address the people's gatherings native leaders rushed from North and South.

Benin Chandra pal was one such leader scheduled to address the people of Madras presidency. On his way from Bengal, he preferred to pass through Visakhapatnam and break the journey at Rajahmundry in East Godavari district in Andhra area. Pal was already acquainted with the place on account of his previous visits to propagate the principles of *Brahmo Samaj*. He was primarily a spiritual leader of Bengal. But his present mission of visiting the Madras presidency was purely political.

The purpose of his tour was to enlighten the public on the British misrule in India. In the course of his lectures he pointed out a number of irregularities and injustices committed by the British administration. He put forth his arguments most convincingly, placing before the public all the facts and figures.

He addressed the meetings regularly for five days. His lectures delivered in English were found to be very impressive. The premises of the Rajahmundry Town Hall was packed with unwieldy crowds. People stood spell-bound though most of them could not understand the language. They very much wished to know at least the essence of his lectures. At times a feeling of unrest prevailed among the audience and the situation could be saved only when a synopsis in Telugu was read out to them.

The meetings were presided over, on some days by Kanchumarti Ramachandra Rao and on the other days by Tanguturi Sreeramulu, Prakasam Pantulu's brother. The organisers did not seem to have bothered much about the problem with the audience. Then it was one middle-aged blind man-hardly 38 years old-who came to the rescue of the organisers. With an extraordinary power of retention, he recollected all the points of Bepin Pal's lecture and explained them to the audience in short simple sentences of chaste Telugu. The fluency and the force with which he rendered the speaker's discourse into Telugu astonished the audience.

The blind man was none else than Chilakamarti Lakshmi Narasimham Pantulu. People knew him as a faithful follower of Kandukuri Veeresalingam, doyen of social reform and pioneer of new literary forms in Telugu.

On the concluding day of Pal's lectures, Chilakamarti composed a poem in Telugu extempore and recited it to the pleasant surprise of the audience. The following is its English translation.

*"Mother India is a good milch cow,
While Indians like calves were bleating,
The wily cowherds called whitemen
Having tied the mouths, were milking the cow".*

The poem aroused joyful ovations among the audience and the whole auditorium reverberated with their incessant applause. It was instantaneously got by heart by a large number of people while the newspapers published the verse without any loss of time. The poem was even written in bold letters on the bridge walls of the river Krishna.

The patriotic content and the simple fluent style of the poem were, obviously, responsible for its immense popularity.

In the year 1907 the Madras provincial political conference was held at Visakhapatnam under the Presidentship of Nyapati Subba Rao Pantulu. The first resolution adopted at the conference was to condemn the action of Punjab government which unjustly imprisoned in Burma, Lala Lajapat Rai, one of the greatest national leaders, on 9 May 1907. One C. Srinivasa Rao, a scholar and patriot, who came all the way from Kurnool to attend the conference, spoke in English on the immediate need to adopt the resolution. Chilakamarti also spoke on the occasion. His speech in Telugu was so inspiring that the members shed tears in sheer joy. Srinivasa Rao shook hands with Chilakamarti saying "I heard your soul-stirring speech with utmost pleasure and inspiration".

Even after the conference came to a close, Chilakamarti looked visibly worried about the imprisonment of Lajapat Rai. An urge from within prompted him to write a couple of poems which revealed his patriotic zeal at that critical hour:

*"To a true devotee of the sacred Motherland
Prisons become palatial buildings;
Fetters become flower garlands;
Gruel becomes a delicious royal dish;
Rough woolen rugs become dazzling silk garments"*.

*"At present our pious Motherland is like
a big prison house;
Even if a prisoner is transferred from one place to another,*

It is only shifting him from one room to the other

in the prison house;

Alas! the whole country is a big prison house!"

These examples are enough to know how patriotic the poet Chilakamarti was.

It is interesting to note how the poet, in spite of his blindness, greatly enriched Telugu literature with artistic excellence coupled with a spirit of social reform. The inspiration and the burning zeal for social reform must have been acquired from his tutelage of Kandukuri Veeresalingam, the poet-reformer who was conferred Rao Bahadur title by the British for his eminence in public life and literary attainments.

Social problems such as women's education, condemnation of child marriages, promotion of widow marriages, eradication of untouchability and opening of Harijan schools were highlighted in the works of Chilakamarti Lakshmi Narasimham too.

Chilakamarti was nineteen years younger than Veeresalingam whose footsteps showed the former, a way to break new ground in Telugu literature with better craftsmanship and patriotism.

As for patriotism, 'Chilakamarti might have gone beyond or away from the limits of Veeresalingam's concept of the same, but the first impulse was provided by the latter'-observes D.Anjaneyulu, in his monograph on Veeresalingam (P.118) referring to Chilakamarti's famous verse about Mother India being used as a milch cow by the British rulers like wily milkmen. In those days Veeresalingam used to plead with the young men not to get involved in political upheavals, but concentrate on their studies. When the young did not relish this advice, he felt that his words had the only effect on them of their taking him for a man devoid of patriotism.

In fact neither the young nor the old was devoid of patriotism. Both of them were equally patriotic in their own way. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the very nature of Indian patriotism with special reference to Chilakamarti's few more verses about the British rule.

CHAPTER-II

PATRIOTISM WITH A DIFFERENCE

Patriotism, in the wider sense of the term, is but love for one's own country. It is necessary that every responsible citizen should love his country. Under any circumstances, it does not mean hatred for other countries or nations. On the other hand patriotism should develop the desirable qualities of common brotherhood and universal love among people.

Indian patriotism had gone a step further and gave a good piece of advice to the world by asking them to love the good qualities even in the the worst enemy.

Although the foreign rule was totally condemned by our national leaders, they never developed hatred for the 'white' people. Further, the best qualities in their administration were appreciated. The good that was done to the country during their regime was unhesitatingly upheld. But what was undesirable and unwarranted was unambiguously censured.

As an example, a small incident may be narrated here.

In June 1895, the Godavari District conference was held at Kakinada for the first time under the presidentship of Nyapati Subba Rao Pantulu. Chilakamarti, aged 28 by then, also attended the meeting. He was, in fact, quite inexperienced in the field of politics. But his heart was bubbling with patriotism and service to humanity. On the first two days of the conference, Chilakamarti was only a silent spectator. On the third day, he stood up and recited fourteen verses composed by him. He himself was amazed at the response of the audience.

These poems became very popular and gained great publicity in every nook and corner of the Godavari district, which was not, by that time, bifurcated into East and West. Narasimham was happy that Veeresalingam Pantulu who normally would not appreciate other's poems-unless they were extremely good-also appreciated his poems on

that day.

The content of the poems may be summed up thus:

“May the British rule prosper most judiciously for all times! This rule extended its jurisdiction from Himalayas to Cape Comerin; this rule brought about an independent thinking in our religious customs and habits; this rule chased away all plunderers like thugs and pindaries; this rule framed new acts skilfully and removed hurdles of the people. It is this rule that gave a patient hearing of the public criticism, levelled against the administrative defects of its own government.

May this British rule prosper most judiciously for all times!

Even the brilliant lamp would, of course, have a little dark shade by its side; even the perfumed beautiful rose has small thorns around it; even the most pleasant moon has a dark spot; even the fruitful rains at times shower thunderbolts; likewise the noble British rule also contains a few defects.

Is not this Godavari district conference held to set them right?

Loyalty to the rulers, loyalty to the Motherland, kindness towards the guiltless and the unduly punished, service to fellow beings, since God is omnipresent-these four are the basic principles of the conference.

May this conference give prosperity and happiness to all! It is a pity that normal public taxes never satisfy these rulers. It is a pity that the unruly officers have no sense of duty. It is a pity that even the well-educated people do not have the courage to question the unlawful authority. It is natural that the uneducated masses cannot explain their miseries to the rulers who do not know the native language. The plight of the farmers knows no bounds. What a pity! How disastrous the conditions are!

Ploughing is taxed! Water is taxed! Small business is taxed! Sale

deeds are taxed!

Even salt is taxed! Oh, my good God!

Everything is taxed! See the plight of the people!

Officers discourteously exact bribes!

Village officers mercilessly collect *Mamuls* (illegal gratification)
 Attenders demand '*Baksheesh*' (Civilized Alms) as a matter of
 right! Half of the crop proceeds should go to the owners towards
 lease payment. The remaining half is paid towards the interest
 payable to the money-lenders! Alas! What is it that is left to the
 poor farmer?

Grass! mere grass!

To him and to his cattle to eat!

What a miserable plight!"

While concluding the poems, the poet-patriot makes an appeal to the
 president of the conference thus:

"Respected President, My dear Subba Rao!

*We know you are a man of action; adventurous
 and kind-hearted; peace-loving and good-natured!*

*Let these pitiable conditions of the people
 be brought to the notice of the authorities,
 reasonably and in a modest way!"*

How logically and convincingly chilakamarti put forth his plea! With
 what a decorum, he made an appeal to the authorities!

There is no need to say that the poems were eye-openers not only to
 the public, but also to the big British government officers who happened
 to see the English translation of these poems published in the Godavari
 district conference Report of 1895, together with the original Telugu

poems.

The translation into English was done by no less a poet than Gurazada Appa Rao, who was then a lecturer in English in the Maharaja's College at Vizianagaram. It was Nyapati Subba Rao Pantulu, the President of the conference, who sent the original poems to Appa Rao for translation into English. [This English version could not be obtained despite all sincere efforts].

Chilakamarti was himself proud of these poems. Towards the end of the sixth chapter of his famous autobiography he made a mention of an interesting and touching incident concerning these Telugu poems.

“My father, having seen the poems, felt excessively joyful. At times he used to gather native villagers and recite them to their hearing with an absorbing interest”.

Is it not a happy incident and a matter of pride to a son that his father recites his poems with a sense of pride?

There were some so-called wise men who told Narasimham that had he written such meritorious poems in praise of the British government, the government would have undoubtedly conferred on him, the prestigious title of Rao Bahadur. Chilakamarti, of course, would grin at such suggestions.

Regarding the British rule, he was very critical about the lapses on their part. At the same time he appreciated the good that was done to the country by them.

A similar incident occurred in the year 1987 when he had to write a few poems on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of Queen Victoria's rule. As the celebrated Queen completed sixty years of her successful reign, the celebrations were held not only in England but also throughout the British Empire on a very grand scale.

At Rajahmundry a grand function was arranged in the Town Hall under the presidentship of the District Collector. Scholar-poets like Kandukuri Veeresalingam and others spoke in praise of Queen Victoria and her able administration. Chilakamarti had great admiration for the Queen's abilities in developing the countries ruled by her. The maximum tribute that he could pay to the Queen was only by composing a

few poems and reciting them at a public meeting.

The poems composed by him on this occasion were mostly in the classical style. The descriptions the compound words and the very content of the poems were all of a high order.

He noted all the good qualities of the Queen, her philanthropic nature, kind-heartedness, courage and valour. Establishment of modern mechanical devices, travel facilities, wireless net-work, irrigation projects and dams, educational institutions and a hundred other good things were very well described in these poems.

The poems were published in the *Chintamani* journal on 22 June 1897. The journal contained not only Narasimham's poems but also a short biography of the Queen written in prose by Veeresalingam Pantulu. The former's poems were very much appreciated by all including Veeresalingam himself.

One important aspect of Chilakamarti's life is noteworthy. He never resisted the temptation of praising the good things nor was he afraid of condemning the undesirable outrightly. Even in the display of his patriotism, this aspect could be seen prominently. His concept was thus slightly different from that of others.

A brief study of his biography will be found instructive and is therefore presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER-III

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Chilakamarti Lakshminarasimham was born on 26 September 1867 in a *Vaidika Brahmin* family of *Arama Dravida* Sect. His parents, Chilakamarti Venkanna and Venkataratnamma were residents of Veeravasaram, a village in West Godavari district. Narasimham was born at Khandavalli village of the same district in the house of his maternal uncle, as it is customary even now that pregnant women are taken to the house of their parents or brothers, for delivery and maternal care.

Narasimham's earlier name was Punnaiah; but later he was named after a popular temple diety Lakshmi Narasimha Swami of Antarvedi village of the same district. The boy was said to have resembled his maternal grandfather, Bhadraiah Sastri who passed away a year before the grandson was born. His body, height, tonal quality, and poetic talent, together with a sort of purblindness were all inherited from the grandfather. Till Narasimham was forty, he was able to see things only in clear daylight. Even during daytime, things kept in dark rooms could not be distinctly seen by him. He was not able to read letters written on the blackboard in the school. Map lines were found to be very difficult to follow for him.

Even before he was sent to school, at the age of five, his *Upanayanam*, the sacred thread ceremony' was performed along with the marriage of his sister, aged about nine. She was married to an old man nearing sixty. The *Upanayanam* of this old groom's son was also performed simultaneously. These events-particularly very young girls being married to old men-had a telling effect on his mind. But such marriages were quite common in those days.

Narasimham had his elementary education in the government school at his native place from 1878 to 1881 and got through the comparative examination held in the Lower fourth class (equivalent to the erstwhile second form or the present seventh class). He passed the Examination

in first class securing the second rank among the successful candidates.

In 1882 he was admitted in the middle school run by the Christian Missionaries at Narasapuram, a small town in those days. Narasimham was good at history and other subjects but not Mathematics. Added to this, the examination in Mathematics was held in the night time since the question paper was received very late. The boy whose eye sight was poor during nights could not write the examination to his satisfaction. Yet he passed in third class since he did very well in other subjects.

In 1885 he was admitted in Matriculation class of the Rajahmundry college where Veeresalingam was the Assistant Telugu Teacher who in his teaching used to dwell more on social reform than the regular class lessons.

In 1887 the golden jubilee of Queen Victoria's rule in India was celebrated all over the country. At Rajahmundry the college principal Metcalfe, the students and staff with flags in their hands went in a procession and reached the museum hall where a large number of citizens also gathered. Popular poets of the day, like Veeresalingam, Vaddadi Subbarayudu and Vavilala Vasudeva Sastri recited their poems on the occasion. In the second instance, the poems of Chilakamarti Lakshmi Narasimham in the name of somebody else were also recited. The poems were appreciated by one and all and people began to enquire as to who was the real author. But Narasimham, the ghost-writer, as a matter of principle, did not reveal the fact. However he felt happy in the heart of hearts that his poetry was up to the mark.

Even as a student, he gained confidence that he could write good poetry which had its appeal to one and all.

Later, when his teacher, Vedam Venkatachalam was leaving for Madras to prosecute B.L. studies, Narasimham wrote five poems about him and the poems received applause from the audience. Gradually the young student established himself as a popular poet.

Play-going was a popular pastime in those days. In 1887, Shakespeare's play, Merchant of Venice was staged at Rajahmundry for the first time. After a year's time, the Eluru Drama company comprising members of Dharwar parsi troupe went over to Rajahmundry. At the request of a friend, Chilakamarti wrote a play entitled *Keechaka Vadha* in 1889.

During this period Chilakamarti was offering free services as a

Telugu Pandit in the local Aryan school, established by his friends. He began to write the famous play *Gayopakhyanam*. By December 1889 he completed two more plays *Sreerama Jananam*, and "*Droupadi Parinayam*".

It was Immaneni Hanumanta Rao Naidu, who established *The Rajahmundry Hindu Nataka Samajam* and rendered yeomen services to the field of histrionics. He was Tanguturi Prakasam's mentor.

In about another year's time the two works-*Parijatapaharanam* and *Nala Natakam* were written and the author Chilakamarti was awarded the title of "Local Shakespeare" by pandit Sivanatha Sastry of Bengal who was on a visit to Rajahmundry to preach the tenets of *Brahmo-samaj*. Chilakamarti was much impressed by his oration in English, as also the principles of *Brahmo-samaj*. He wrote poems in praise of Pandit Sivanatha Sastry.

At the age of 24, Chilakamarti performed *Ashtavadhanam* (a poetic feat concentrating on eight subjects at a time) at Dhavaleshwaram in the presence of the famous Twin Avadhana poets. Tirupati Venkata kavulu of Andhra. Though Chilakamarti did this poetic feat at Rajahmundry also, he was of the opinion that these *Avadhanas* were rather injurious to the brain and it would be better to spend time in composing literary works of permanent value. As a result, he discontinued *Avadhanas* and never again performed them.

In 1892 Chilakamarti was appointed as a school teacher at Rajahmundry Innispeta on a salary of Rs. 12/- a month. After a year's time, he married Venkayamma aged ten years and she was 16 years younger to him in age.

Chilakamarti had great admiration for Veeresalingam. When the title of *Rao Bahadur* was conferred on him, Chilakamarti wrote nine poems in praise of him. Veeresalingam's Telugu novel, *Rajasekhara Charitram* set the pattern for the subsequent novels in Andhra in those days. In 1894, Nyapati Subba Rao held a competition in 'Novel Writing' with a view to inviting Telugu novels written on the model of English novels. Only three entries were received and Chilakamarti's "*Ramachandra Vijayam*" won the first prize. In 1896 his historical novel *Hemalata* also won the first place among the competing novels. The next year *Ahalyabai* also won the same distinction enabling its author to make the hat trick.

Chilakamarti had a chequered career and varied experiences in life. He worked as an assistant editor of the journal "*Saraswati*" and later in 1906 he published a monthly journal "*Manorama*" in which most of Chilakamarti's works were serialised. The full text of his play, *Prasanayyadavam* was published in this journal.

In 1899 he opened an elementary school at Rajahmundry imparting instruction upto fourth class. A good number of boys began to attend the school and it developed into a High School in about four years. But government recognition could not be obtained. In 1909 the school was named *Hitakarini* and Chilakamarti was only a member in the governing body of the school.

For the uplift of the oppressed classes, he started a separate school and named it *Ramamohana Pathasala*. His concern and sympathies for the downtrodden were remarkable.

His association with *Brahmo Samaj* brought about a change of outlook in his life towards the age-old Hindu customs and traditions. When his father Venkanna passed away in 1885, he was initially reluctant to perform the funeral rites as he had no faith in such rituals. But to satisfy the elders and relatives he performed them.

In 1906, the followers of *Brahmo Samaj* in Andhra removed their sacred threads, almost renouncing the *Brahminism*. Veeresalingam also fell in line with them. There was great commotion among the orthodox in the town and a meeting was held to condemn the actions of the *Brahmos*. But Chilakamarti upheld the cause of *Brahmo Samaj* and supported the actions of Veeresalingam.

Even during the *Pushkara* (12 year) ceremony held at the holy river Godavari at Rajahmundry Chilakamarti did not perform the rites, despite the persuasion of his relatives.

The Telugu weekly, *Desamata* which was run by him was a mouth-piece of his patriotism and self respect. He did not agree to receive a subsidy from the government for this weekly because he knew that it would be difficult to offer legitimate criticism against the government, when it became a subsidised journal. He preferred to forego thousands of rupees of subsidy for the sake of a healthy principle of journalism.

In 1915, Chilakamarti assumed charge as Secretary of the National School at Rajahmundry. He established an institution for adult education and named the Night School which he conducted *Vivekananda*

Pathasala.

Chilakamarti, despite his blindness, made extensive tours to deliver lectures and to participate in literary gatherings.

His address during the Birthday celebrations of poet Tikkana at Nellore, his presidential speech at the Anniversary celebrations of *Krishnadevaraya Bhasha Nilayam* at Hyderabad, his lectures meant exclusively for women's education, social reform and spread of Sanskrit language attracted many notable men and women of the day like Sir Akbar Hyderi and Sarojini Naidu.

Chilakamarti was responsible for the development of Library movement and the present *Goutami Granthalayam* of Rajahmundry was once presided over by him when it was first named after Veeresalingam by Nalam Krishna Rao, a philanthropic citizen of the town.

In 1981 Rabindranath Tagore visited Pithapuram, a princely estate in East Godavari district. Chilakamarti took an appointment with him and talked to him for about half an hour. He recited some of his Telugu poems with their English renderings. He asked Tagore, out of genuine curiosity, to explain to him about the real purpose of Prayer to God. By that time, Tagore was well-known in Andhra literary circles by his Nobel prize winning *Gitanjali*.

On 27 May, 1919 Veeresalingam breathed his last. Condolence meetings were held throughout Andhra. Chilakamarti's grief knew no bounds.

The non-cooperation movement was spreading rapidly in 1920, throughout the country. Chilakamarti was the president of Nationalists, Society. After a couple of years he handed over the *Ramamohun Roy* and *Vivekananda Schools* to one Ramachandra Rao who was interested in the uplift of oppressed classes. As he did not like to receive government grants, he converted them into National Schools which gradually became defunct for want of funds and student attendance.

On 26 September 1927, Chilakamarti completed 60 years. Friends and relatives were formally invited for private dinner and books were presented to him. However, the public meeting was held on 11 March 1928. Kasinathuni Nageswara Rao Pantulu, founder of Andhra Patrika presided over the function. Ten volumes of the printed books of Chilakamarti were kept in a decorated chest and presented to him. This was the first *Shashti-poorti* celebration of its kind held at Rajamundry.

On 13 June 1930, Chilakamarti's wife, Venkayamma died of heart attack. Her demise created a vacuum in his life and he felt almost helpless and solitary. He wept in verses addressed to the Almighty who took her away from him. She bore no children for him. But she treated her kith and kin as her own children.

His literary endeavours and social service did not stop on account of her demise, since Time was the healer of all wounds.

In 1932 Chilakamarti attended the celebrations in which Sreepada Krishnamurti Sastry was honoured with *Gandapendera* (an ornament worn like a garter on one leg) for his outstanding literary achievements.

Sir Raghupati Venkata Ratnam Naidu, the leader of Brahmos in Andhra made Chilakamarti the President of the Andhra Theists, Society. Nyapati Subba Rao invited him as honorary member of the Hindu Society.

His services to the youth, particularly school pupils were noteworthy. He wrote Readers for the elementary school children from the first to fifth classes. The Indian publishing house published these books under the caption 'Sadasiva Readers'.

On 30 October 1938 an oil painting of Chilakamarti, drawn by Chamakura Bhashyakarulu Naidu, was unveiled in the Town Hall of Rajahmundry amidst a large gathering of eminent personalities and citizens of the town.

In 1940, Chilakamarti's 74th birthday was celebrated at Eluru when he was invited to preside over the function held in connection with the Anniversary celebrations of Raja Ramamohun Roy.

On the 6th April 1942, he received a great honour at Kakaraparru village in West Godavari district. Seated in a decorated palanquin, borne on the shoulders of learned scholars, he was taken in an impressive procession amidst chanting of Vedic hymns through the streets while women offered *Mangala Haratis* (auspicious lamps) to the poet.

The next year the Andhra University conferred on him prestigious title *Kala Prapoorna*. Owing to ill health, he could not receive it in person. The Governor of Madras, who was the Chancellor of the university, presided over the special meeting at which Raja Vikramadeva Varma presented the poet a *Shawl* laced with gold and silver, which together with the certificate of the title was sent to the poet by the Registrar, Kurma Venugopalaswami.

Another happy event towards the fag end of Chilakamarti's life was that his popular play- *Gayopakhyanam* was staged by eminent actors and the amount of gate collections was kept with some of his close friends and from December 1943 onwards a sum of Rs.40/- PM. was arranged to be sent to him regularly.

Chilakamarti's earnings were always meagre. He had to maintain a large family. In addition to this, one escort and scribe had to be maintained throughout his life, as he was blind. In the year 1942, when he was requested to write his autobiography, he had to ask for a remuneration of Rs. 30/- P.M. from Rayasam Venkatasivudu and Vissa Appa Rao, in addition to the salary of Rs. 30/- P.M. which he was receiving from the Maharaja of Pithapuram. He did not have a house of his own at Rajahmundry. Including the house rent he required Rs.60/- P.M. He was very grateful to all those from whom he received help in kind and in cash. He led a quiet and peaceful life despite poverty and blindness. His services to Telugu literature in particular and the society in general were invaluable.

He breathed his last on 17th June 1946; But his works will remain as everlasting landmarks in the history of Telugu literature.

CHAPTER-IV

A BRIEF NOTE ON THE LITERARY WORKS

No doubt, Veeresalingam is reckoned as the chief architect of the Renaissance of Telugu literature in the latter half of the nineteenth century. But he is known to most people outside Andhra mainly as a pioneer of social reform in the South. In a way, he was responsible for the rejuvenation of social life in Andhra. The enormity of his service as a social reformer in comparison with that of his work as a pioneer in modern Telugu literature, made people look upon him more as a reformer.

In fact, as a writer, he was the first to try his hand at many of the modern literary forms such as minor poem, burlesque, biography, autobiography, novel, satire, farce and plays.

Chilakamarti cannot be considered as the 'first' in any of these literary forms. But as a literary craftsman he had excelled many in some of these forms. In fact he was no less a social reformer than Veeresalingam. If Veeresalingam was the path-finder in this respect, Chilakamarti was a torch-bearer along the path, as the former went on breaking new ground.

Both of them were versatile writers in verse as well as in prose. The literary output of both was conspicuously voluminous. There was practically no genre left untouched by them except in one or two spheres. If History of the Telugu poets was a plus point for Veeresalingam, the life stories of great men was similarly a credit point to Chilakamarti.

Politically and socially Bengal always stood in the frontline and showed the way to others in those days. Raja Ramamohun Roy, Iswara Chandra Vidyasagar and a good number of others were pathbreaking social reformers who exercised great influence on Veeresalingam. This was one of the reasons for Chilakamarti to write the biographies of such great men.

In almost all his works, be it verse or prose, the way in which Chilakamarti narrated the incident instantaneously captured the reader's

mind. The imageries he presented in detail, the way in which he unfolded the story with a special technique of narration, the diction he employed with a familiar expression intelligible even to the average reader, above all, the sincerity of purpose with which he wrote went a long way for the success and popularity of his works.

The third edition of Chilakamarti's autobiography published in 1968, furnishes a list of his works the total number of which comes to 51. A few more titles require to be added to this list.

The earliest work *Keechakavadha*, a stageplay, was written in 1889; the last work *Bammera Potaraju*, and incomplete play, was written in 1946, the year in which the poet passed away. Another incomplete play *Iharischandra* was also probably written sometime during the year 1946.

Taking into consideration the forms of literature, Chilakamarti's works could be classified thus:

1. Verses 2. Plays 3. *Prahasanas* (Broad Farces) 4. Novels 5. Long stories and Biographies of greatmen 6. Autobiography.

VERSES

In good old days, unless one was proficient in composing verses, he could not be called a poet. For this reason, the first exercises of almost all the writers were only Verses and Chilakamarti was no exception.

The earliest Verses were written by him in the year 1887 on the occasion of the golden jubilee celebrations of Queen Victoria's rule. A number of extempore verses and verses recited at several meetings come under one category. *Satakas* (containing not less than a hundred verses) come under another category. If the Verses written for the plays and playlets are also taken into account, they come under a third category. In 1910, he wrote in Telugu Verses, a concise *Ramayana Of Valmiki*.

PLAYS

His Plays could be classified into two categories. The first category is the independent and the original, though the theme was borrowed from the classical and epic poems. The second category is translations from Sanskrit plays.

ORIGINAL PLAYS

1. *Keechaku Vudha* 1889
2. *Droupadi Parinayamu* 1889
3. *Sreerama Jananamu* 1889
4. *Gayopakhyanam* 1890
5. *Parijatapaharanamu* 1890
6. *Nala Natakanu* 1890
7. *Seeta Kalyanam* 1890
8. *Prasanna Yodavamu* 1905
9. *Prahlada Charitramu* 1907
10. *Chatura Chandrasah* 1907
11. *Tilottama* 1907

INCOMPLETE PLAYS

12. *Bannera Potaraju* 1946
13. *Harischandra* 1946

PLAYS TRANSLATED FROM SANSKRIT

I *Parvatee Parinayamu Of Bana* 1899

(This Bana is not the author of Kadambari)

II *Bhasa Natakachakram* 1909-1927

1. *Duta Vakyanu*
- 2.. *Karna Bharanu*
3. *Duta Ghatotkachamu*
4. *Uru Bhangamu*
5. *Madhyama Vyayogamu*
- 6.. *Pancha Ratranu*

7. *Pratijna Yougandharayanamu*
8. *Swapna Vasavadattamu*
9. *Bala Charitramu*
10. *Charudattamu*
11. *Avinarakamu*
12. *Pratima*
13. *Abhishekamu*

PRAHASANAS (Broad Farces)

The *Prahasanas* of Chilakamarti could be classified into three kinds. As a matter of rule and as the word *Prahasana* connotes, it should create much laughter and hence known as a broad farce. But even a farce must have a purpose. Unless it conveys a message, it cannot be called genuine *Prahasana*. Keeping this in view, Chilakamarti wrote almost half of his *Prahasanas* with the specific aim of conveying a message. If this is the first category of the lot, the second category is purely for the sake of farce. Loud laughter is sometimes produced by mere dialogue and its articulation. The third category is much like an essay through which comment and caustic criticism are offered on the evils prevailing in the society.

Balavanta Brahmanartham, Gayyali Ganganma, Badhira Chatusthayam and dozens of other *Prahasanas* could be cited as examples of these three categories.

Laughter is produced not only through sequence and incident but also through verbal irony and irregular composition of words from different languages.

NOVELS

Now coming to the major contribution of Chilakamarti to Novel literature, it could again be divided into four kinds.

Novels containing original themes could again be classified into 'social' and 'epic' works according to their content.

Ramachandra Vijayam (1894) *Ganapati* (1918-21) *Rajaratnam* (1918- 21) and *Vijayalakshmi* are purely social Novels.

Hemalata (1896) *Ahalyabai* (1897) *Krishnaveni* (1911) *Karpoora Manjari* (1907-27) *Mani Manjari* (1911) and *Survarna Guptudu* are historical novels, while *Soundarya Tilaka* (1998) is partly of the epic content.

Chilakamarti translated into Telugu a couple of English novels written by the Bengali author, Ramesh Chandra Dutt.
written by the Bengali author Ramesh Chandra Dutt.

'The Lake of palms' and 'The Slave Girl of Agra' are the two novels translated by Chilakamarti under the titles *Sudha Saracchandram* (1909-27) and *Dasikanya*.

WORKS LOST

One sad episode in the life of Chilakamarti may be recalled as we refer to Ramesh Chandra Dutt. Dutt translated *Rigveda* into Bengali. Similarly Chilakamarti also tried to translate it into Telugu with the help of some of his assistants. He purchased the relevant works in original, appointed pandits on monthly salary, and made a thorough study of the text. With the help of an appointed clerk who used to take dictations from him, he translated almost one *Mandala* (part) of *Rigveda* and published a portion of it. But the remaining nine *Mandalas* were left untranslated and he could not, however, totally succeed in his attempt. While narrating this pitiable story, Chilakamarti heaved a sigh saying "I just left it off as it is possible only for the moneyed people and not for a poor man like me". (Autobiography P.554). Alas! it is the bad luck of Telugu literature that he could not complete the work and could not, at least, preserve the translated portion. Since it is not available now, it is really a great loss to Telugu literature.

Prithvirajeeyam an incomplete poem containing two hundred verses in two cantos was also lost.

He began translating *Bana Bhattu's Kadambari* into Telugu and did it to some extent. When he informed this to Veeresalingam who was then staying at Madras, he discouraged him saying that translation of such difficult works which contained long-winding compound words and words with double meaning was not easy and hence they were not easily intelligible to students. On the advice of his revered mentor-Veeresalingam, Chilakamarti stopped translating *Kadambari* and this incomplete work also is not traceable now.

There is another unobtainable novel entitled *Syamala* which was an

adaptation of Shakespeare's famous play 'Macbeth'. In this work Duncan, the king of Scotland, becomes the Telugu king of *Nidubrolu*. Macbeth becomes a Telugu Commander named *Vijayarayadu* who murders the king on the advice of a saint. Symala is none else than Lady Macbeth. This he did perhaps to bring the story closer to the comprehension of Telugu readers.

STORIES

Like all other forms of literature, narration of stories and chronicles, tales and fables also took special twist at the hands of Chilakamarti. Of all the literary forms he attempted, story-telling and narrative fiction were his forte. The way in which he narrated his own life story in his autobiography bears ample testimony to this.

His *Rajasthanu Kathavali* (1906-07) is a translation of Lieutenant Colonel James Tod's celebrated English work entitled "The Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India". James Tod did not treat his work as a regular record of history, but offered it only as a copious collection of material for the future historians as he himself explained in the 'Foreword' of his work (p.9). The text contains 24 stories of the royal dynasties of Rajasthan. Since Chilakamarti was already good at writing historical novels, these stories he could narrate with greater ease and felicity. The story of *Ranakumbha* in which *Meera Devi's* devotion to *Lord Krishna* was highlighted, received better treatment in the translation of Chilakamarti than that of Tod's original.

Again there is *Bharata Katha Manjari* (1911) containing 19 stories which convey morals and ethical values. Some stories are of epic nature while the others are like tales of birds and animals aimed at teaching a lesson to human beings. The story of *Viswamitra And The Outcaste*, *The Story Of Goutama And Devendra*, *The Story Of The Three Fishes*, and *The Story Of Cat And Rat* etc. are some examples.

FUN WITH A PURPOSE

Chamatkara Manjari (1927) is another outstanding example of Chilakamarti's zeal for narrating moral stories. The book, divided into two parts, contains 48 stories of which the stories of greatmen belonging not only to India, but also to foreign countries. *Rockfeller* and *General*

Washington are given equal importance along with *Bhartrihari* and *Venana*. Skill, ingenuity and wit are brought into focus through the incidents narrated in these stories. Hence the title of the book *Chanakara Manjari* (A Bunch of Adroitnesses) is fully justified.

Another bunch of wonderful stories written by him is *Chitra Katha Gucchanu*. *Gucchanu* or *Manjari* means a cluster of flowers. The author's intention in naming the book so is to convey that the stories are like fragrant flowers spreading sweet smell of wit and morality. There are eight stories in this collection most of which are mockeries or burlesque in their nature.

JEST AND JOKES

If Chilakamarti's *Prahasanas* are intended to serve as broad farces to reform the individuals and mend the society through satire and mockery, a pair of his other prose works such as *Vinodamulu* (1906-08) and *Navvula Gani* (1909-27) are also meant for producing fun and frolic through authentic jest and joke. The very title *Vinodamulu* means amusement whereas *Navvula Gani* means a mine or fund of laughter.

Vinodamulu are in the nature of short sketches or tit bits. They are entertaining as well as instructive. They are, in fact, a collection of incidents that took place in the country and were popular among the Telugu people.

SEASONED JOURNALISM

When *Navvula Gani* was being serialised in the journals like *Manorama* and *Desamata*, it was very much appreciated by the readers. People were always looking forward to the coming issues of the journals.

Chilakamarti was not an ordinary poet or prose writer. His works comprised almost all the forms prevalent in the then Telugu literature. He was an accomplished Journalist too. He was quite aware of the techniques of popularising a journal. In those days, when he first introduced the feature *Husya Lalalu* (creepers of fun and jest) it was well received and enjoyed by large number of readers. Quite possibly, those *Husya Lalalu* were like the present day tit bits, cartoons and jokes published in the popular weeklies and dailies.

Chilakamarti had rich experience in the field of journalism. He was editor of the Telugu monthlies *Saraswati* and *Manorama* and a weekly named *Desamata*. The earlier monthly *Saraswati* did not last longer as it was the first experience for him and the journal did not have adequate funds to maintain itself.

One important aspect of Chilakamarti's Journalism was that all the three journals run by him were purely literary. He believed that a literary journal should invariably guide the contemporary writers and strive hard for the progress of the contemporary literature and also should awaken the social conscience of his contemporaries. From this point of view he serialised novels and plays in his journals, reviewed contemporary novels, published manuscripts, and introduced prolonged literary discussions for the benefit of the readers.

BIOGRAPHIES

The last but one form of literature is biography-life-history of greatmen written by Chilakamarti. Veeresalingam's *Kavula Charitra* (The History of Telugu poets) must have inspired him to a great extent. Unlike that of Veeresalingam, Chilakamarti's way of expression and narration was more naïve and simple and hence it attracted the readers. In fact the content of *Kavula Charitra* was more a tough subject from the point of view of determining the dates of poets with internal and external evidences, keeping in view the inscriptions and palm leaf manuscripts. Chilakamarti did not much bother about these details, but simply narrated the story in such a way that any layman who knew the language could easily understand and enjoy it with absorbing interest. Here the point I would like to drive home is that Chilakamarti was a highly talented story-teller.

Lives of greatmen in three volumes (1906-08), *Raghukula Charitamu* (1919), *Siddhartha Charitra* (1919) *Kalidasa Charitra* (1921) *Rama Krishna Paramahansa Charitra* (1921) and *Samartha Ramadas* (1927) and a few others' life histories are exemplary as they are not only interesting but also instructive particularly to the younger generations of all times.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Chilakamarti made several observations about writing an autobiog-

raphy, and these are noteworthy -:

"It is well and good if one writes with absorbing interest the biography, of others. But it is difficult to gather information about others exhaustively. It is, therefore, desirable to write one's own biography.

There is again another inconvenience in doing so. One may possibly be inclined to highlight one's good qualities alone, concealing most of his follies and shortcomings. If one could resist this temptation like Mahatma Gandhi, the autobiography would undoubtedly be ideal.

The basic requirement for an autobiography is that the person who writes it must invariably be great so that his life should set an example to others".

Chilakamarti, with all modesty, apologises to the readers for having written his autobiography which he was constrained to do, at the request of his intimate friends who maintained him with the required subsistence during the period and also for some more time after completion of the work.

Despite his blindness and old age (75yrs) he could complete the work (containing 646 pages) in 4 months and 24 days ie. from 18 March 1942 to 12 July 1942.

This autobiography of Chilakamarti, I believe, is easily one of the world's great autobiographies which are a must for readers.

In this chapter, I have made a modest attempt to dwell briefly on all the literary forms attempted by Chilakamarti..

In fact, they require to be studied in greater detail.

CHAPTER-V

THE POET AT VERSIFICATION

If an artist is proficient in more than one art and even if he is equally proficient in all the arts he practised, the degree of difference in his artistic proficiencies makes him popular only in one or two of the art forms. This is true in the case of Chilakamarti too.

As a matter of fact, he became well-known in the early days of his life only through the art of his versification. But when he became popular as a playwright, novelist and story-teller and so on, he was not very much remembered as a verse-writer.

Most of his extempore verses vanished in the thin air as they were not properly preserved. Some of the verses recited at public meetings were not even recorded.

His verses written on Queen Victoria's rule gained much popularity. Similarly, many of his verses written on distinguished individuals also are excellent from several points of view.

A verse composed extempore on young Tanguturi Prakasam, makes the handsome figure of the well-dressed young man appear before us even today:

"The way in which he combed his hair, had the sacred castemark on the forehead, wore the saffron dhoti and the striped shirt gracefully covered by an upper garment on the left shoulder, with long-cropped curly hair swaying around the ears, with a smile sprouting upon the face—how charmingly young Tanguturi Prakasam arrived at the Dhavaleswaram shrine dedicated to Lord Janardana!"

Chilakamarti and Tanguturi were very close to each other. The latter

used to play important roles in the plays written by the former.

When Prakasani became a Minister of Madras (composite) State, he specially visited Rajahmundry to see his good old friend- Chilakamarti.

Vaddadi Subharayakavi's Telugu translation of *Veni Samhara*

(written in Sanskrit by Bhattanarayana) was a favourite play of Chilakamarti even while he was young. He described fascinatingly the author's talent thus in *Kanda* metre.

“Vasurayakavi who is no less than Brahma, the creator of all beings, whose better-half is Saraswati, the goddess of learning- rendered *Veni Samhara* exceedingly well! How refreshingly his Verses give life to the listener!”

There are verses of chilakamarti written in a lighter vein just for fun sake. His verses on *Pakodi* (an eatable made of bengalgram powder. Chillis and onion fried on oil) with a Pun played on the word, were written in *Kanda* metre and are still memorable to poets who taste the 'hot' dish regularly.

Chilakamarti wrote verses on Gladston, the great intellectual of Britain and on D.Pedabapaiah, a popular devotee of Mother India, as also on the revered poet-reformer Veeresalingam at the time of his passing away in 1919.

The meaningful small verse, full with Chilakamarti's feelings about Veeresalingam, the great social reformer of Andhra, still adorns not only the *Hitakarini School*, established by him but also abides in the hearts of all Andhras.

“Countrymen, look! Here is the poet Veeresalingam who sacrificed all that he had-his life, his living house, his learning, his precious time, and property - for the benefit of all people! How great a man he is !”

LONG POEMS

Apart from stray verses like these, Chilakamarti also wrote a few long poems like *Prithvirajeyam*, *Sangraha Ramayana*, and a few

Satakas also.

Prithvirajeeeyam was a translation from an English work-“ The Heroines of India” authored by Manmathanatha Dutt. Chilakamarti's poem was none else than the story of Samyukta devi. As against the will of her father-Jayachandra, she loved Prithviraj. How valiantly Prithviraj carries her away and marries her is the theme of the poem. Since Prithviraj is the hero there, the poem bears his name as the title as different from that of the original.

There is a sad story about this work. “The work was done exceedingly well ” was an encomium passed by the famous writer Mokkapati Subbarayudu who was the personal secretary to the Maharaja of Pithapuram. Having been thus encouraged, Chilakamarti pursued the project and completed two cantos in 200 verses by 1899. He kept the unfinished work in a box without locking it and his niece by name Ravuri Venkata Subbamma, thinking that it was some useless book, tore it to pieces. The poet felt very unhappy about the loss of this precious material. Despite her act of unintended ill-turn, he had great affection for the girl. At a later date, in the year 1928 it was, perhaps, the same girl who received Ubhayabhasha Praveena from the Andhra University and she was the first woman to get that honour there. Veeresalingam gave scholarly guidance to her for the examination.

Sangraha Ramayana was a work containing Telugu verses translated from 700 slokas of Sanskrit *Ramayana* of Valmiki. Since the original 24000 slokas were abridged to a mere 700, the work was called *Sangraha Ramayana*. The descriptive portions, were omitted and the main theme was left untouched.

This book which was prescribed as a text book for the students taking examination for Higher Elementary Grade, fetched the poet a prize worth Rs. 350/- for which he thanked his friend Nyapati Subba Rao at whose instance he has undertaken the work.

In the year 1937, Chilakamarti wrote School Readers for the children of first to fifth classes.

SATAKAS

Of all his poems, *Satakas* became most popular.

Geeta Manjari was meant exclusively for school-going children. It

was published in two parts containing 119 and 109 verses respectively. In the year 1931 these verses were prescribed for study by first, second and third form pupils in the English medium schools. Part one of the book dwells on good conduct while part two imparts knowledge of worldly affairs. A sample from the Part II:

“If one goes by the right path, he easily reaches the goal-just as the train, regularly running on the rail-track, reaches the destination”. (part II-109)

These verses were called ‘*Geeta Manjari*’ because they were written in *Tetageeti Metre* and not in any song pattern.

The other work entitled *Kripambhonidhi Satakam* was written in *Sardulavikridita Metre*. The style and content were also meant for elders. *Kripambhonidhi* means God who is himself an ocean of benevolence. The poet addressing God wrote about 213 verses, in which a few reveal the principles of *Brahmo Samaj*, giving here and there, the meaning of the maxims from Upanishats. Quite fittingly this *Sataka* was released on the occasion of the centenary of Raja Ramamohun Roy's demise.

The last poems are an expression of his sorrow and grief over the departed soul of his wife. He prays to God to see that her soul rests in peace.

The death of a wife is generally regarded as the severest blow to the husband. But in the case of Chilakamarti, it was much more than that, because he lost the best companion and partner in life at the age of 63, particularly when he was totally blind.

The last of the three *Satakas* was *Bhallata Sataka*, a faithful translation of the original Sanskrit work of Bhallata.

The technique followed in the original to teach morals was *Anyupadesa*, instruction through an indirect reference by *Innuendo*.

For example:

“Except divine beings none else is blessed with winkless eyes;
Oh, blessed fish! you also have similar eyes; but what for? Your

divine eyes affected by ignorance do not help you to escape from the fisherman's hook covered with a sweet worm".

Under the pretext of instructing a fish, the poet instructs man not to be carried away by seeming sweet things which ultimately are dangerous to life. This technique, called *Anyapadesu* is purposefully employed. The translation is quite upto the mark and gives an impression that it is an originally written one.

While commenting on the verses of Chilakamarti, it is necessary to say a few words about the verses that appeared in his plays in a large number. As his plays are dealt with under a separate head, the verses in the plays also are discussed under that head.

One thing is certain. Unlike the verses in the plays of Panuganti Lakshmi Narasimha Rao, a contemporary play-wright of repute. Chilakamarti's verses are meant to be sung with music by the actors. The metrical form of the verse, splitting the lines, together with the thought content and diction of the verse to suit the sentiment and easy articulation made Chilakamarti's plays more popular among the people including the common folk like cowherds.

In one of his verses, Chilakamarti says that God's name is sweeter than sugar, the delicious jack-fruit, sugarcane juice, fresh honey and tasteful fruit of the date tree. The poet's rapturous descriptions of God are also responsible for the popularity of the verses concerned.

Chilakamarti is, however, more remembered by his plays and novels than by verses composed by him. As a literary form, the play indeed is comprehensive and more accomplished than many other art forms.

Now let us have a look at his plays.

CHAPTER-VI

THE PLAY WRIGHT CUM PRODUCER

The modern Telugu play had its beginnings sometime during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. During the two decades commencing from 1860 A.D. the modern Telugu play began not only to be read but also to be enacted *Manjari Madhukareeyam* of Korada Ramachandra Sastry, *Narakasura Vyayogamu* of Kokkonda Venkataratnam were considered to be original plays in Telugu. Paravastu Venkata Rangacharya, the first translator of *Abhijnanu Sakuntalam* into Telugu and *Vavilala Vasudeva Sastry* who translated Julius Caesar into Telugu could be considered as the earliest playwrights who attempted to render plays from other languages like Sanskrit and English into Telugu.

In the year 1880, Veeresalingam, having been influenced by the novel performances of the Parsi players of Dharwar troupe in the Andhra area, started his own troupe of young players, mostly consisting of his own students and put on boards *Chamatkara Ratnavali*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's 'The Comedy of Errors. To bring about homeliness to it, from the audience's point of view, the names of characters such as Solinus, Duke of Ephesus and Antipholus of Ephesus were changed as *Dharmapala* and *Vasantaka*. This method at a later stage, was followed by Chilakamarti when he wrote *Syamala* adapting Shakespeare's Macbeth, which has been referred to in the earlier chapter.

These were all the early exercises of Telugu playwrights who strove hard to get their plays staged by native troupes. While playwrights like Vaddadi Subbarayudu, Nadella purushottam, Kavi and Dharmavaram Krishnamacharyulu were enriching the modern Telugu play with their works, Chilakamarti, though younger in age than Vadam Venkataraya Sastry, Kolachalam Srinivasa Rao and Panuganti Lakshmi Narasimha Rao and others began to write plays with a dynamic spirit. Within a brief span of two years from 1889, he wrote as many as eight plays at the request of Iammaneni Hanumanta Rao, the active organiser of *Hindu*

Nataka Samajam of which Chilakamarti, became the president in the year 1901. The plays of other writers also were, of course, staged by this troupe.

During the years from 1880 to 1886 the Dharwar troupe of Parsi players and the *Sarasa Vinodini Sabha* of Dharmavaram Krishnamacharyulu and *Hindu Nataka Samajam* of Immaneni Hanumanta Rao rendered yeomen services to the stage play. In the year 1887 Immaneni Hanumanta Rao who came to Rajahmundry, along with Tanguturi Prakasam settled there as a school teacher and began his dramatic activities with the help of the enthusiastic young writer, Chilakamarti, whose first play *Keechaka Vadha* was staged in a thatched shed by the *Hindu Nataka Samajam*. While Immaneni played the role of Bhima, Prakasam played the role of Droupadi. In the play *Droupadi Parinayam* of Chilakamarti, immaneni was again *Bhima*, while Tanguturi was Arjuna. In *Sreerama Jananam* the former was Ravana and the latter was Dasaratha. In *Gayopakhyanam*, the former was Gaya while the latter was Chitrlekha in some Acts and Arjuna in the other Acts. The system of one actor playing two roles in one play had already taken a shape even by that time. Further, it was evident that Tanguturi Prakasam who later became a Minister and Chief Minister was a versatile actor who played a variety of roles irrespective of their being male or female. Another important feature of Chilakamarti's play-writing was that he introduced some characters without verses keeping in view the actors available at the time. Though this was not a healthy practice for an ideal play, it became inevitable from the production point of view. The picture-goers see at present, almost all the films being produced in such a way that the very theme is conceived only to highlight a particular popular hero. Circumstances had led Chilakamarti also, in those days, to create characters in such way as to suit the actors available. However it was creditable that the values of dramaturgy and poetic art were not sacrificed for the sake of performance with the available talent. Tanguturi Prakasam played the role of Satyabhama in the play *Parijatapaharanam* written by Chilakamarti in 1890. Both the author and the actors received ovation for their role- performance.

Chilakamarti's experiences as an accompanist of the troupe, *Hindu Nataka Samajam* were varied and quite interesting.

One Ramanujayya who was playing a pivotal role in the plays written

by Chilakamarti was an awful addict to drink. One day he came dead drunk to the stage and was sent out by Hanumanta Rao who grew wild at him. When Ramanujayya passed away, owing to excessive drinking, grief-stricken Chilakamarti said 'How difficult it is to find a substitute for this blessed singer!'

Sometimes a cook would cause some problem by suddenly disappearing from the troupe. On a festive day in 1891, the troupe had no food at all till late in the afternoon at Amalapuram, where they had to stage a play. At the same place when *Gayopakhyanam* was to be staged, two actors scheduled to perform the roles of Krishna and Balarama went away for some reason, perhaps with some grudge. For the role of Krishna a substitute could be found; but the role of Balarama became a problem. One important thing to note here is that Chilakamarti himself came forward to play the role of Balarama in that exigency. But it did not materialise since the original actor turned up after getting reconciled. Had he not turned up, Chilakamarti would have had the reputation of not only as the playwright but also as an actor. He was hardly 24 years old at that time.

At Amalapuram, Kakinada and Rajahmundry the troupe was involved in altercations and fist fights, exchanging blows with unruly elements outside the theatre. Chilakamarti tried to pacify the situation, but sometimes he found it difficult to control Prakasam whose righteous indignation often exceeded all bounds. When high-handed officers and some influential men demanded free passes for the shows, Chilakamarti never yielded to their demand, particularly after he became president of the troupe from 1901.

During his tenure as president he was very strict in the matter of discipline of the performers. If any actor was found to be an addict to drink, he was forthwith dismissed from the troupe and his membership mercilessly terminated. But if he really repented for his vices, he was, however, readmitted.

Even with regard to the issue of free passes to Government officials who unjustifiably demanded so, Chilakamarti bluntly refused. It was, indeed an uphill task to observe this rule. He was never afraid of officers when justice was on his side.

During the period of Chilakamarti's presidentship of the troupe one Gunneswara Rao was the Vice-president of the *Hindu Nataka Samajam*.

Prior to 1894, when Hanumanta Rao was at the helm, only Chilakamarti's plays were enacted by this *Samajam*. After Chilakamarti became president, other writers' plays also were enacted. Veeresalingam's plays along with those of Dharmavaram and Vaddadi were performed. These plays contained verses, and actors used to sing them with full vigour and melody. With the introduction of this kind of performance the prose plays as well as verse plays came to the forefront.

Later on a theatre was constructed at Rajahmundry also by Satyavolu Lakshmipati who fixed up the rent @Rs.20/- P.M. The plays which were till then performed in thatched sheds had the minimum facility of staging in a regular theatre.

There was an increasing demand for the copies of Chilakamarti's plays which were got printed by Gunneswara Rao who paid him a sum of Rs. 1000/- for four plays, purchasing the copyright for five years. Of these four plays *Gayopakhyanam* was one which sold more than a lakh of copies *Parijatapuharanam*, *Sita Kalyanam* and *Droupadi Parinayam* were the other three plays in which the poet included verses while getting them printed.

But when business trend entered the troupe, differences of opinion began to come up as a result of which the well established *Hindu Nataka Samajam* was split into two and they went into the hands of Gunneswara Rao and Nageswara Rao.

Chilakamarti was sometimes constrained to write plays at the request of others on payment of remuneration for the maintenance of his large family. This, at times, deterred him from writing plays of his own choice with the natural inspiration of a poet from within. The bitter experiences of the present day film writers were in a way familiar to Chilakamarti also. He admitted, it was a good augury that the modern equipment of *Surabhi* troupe attracted the people. This shows that he was not an orthodox man in the production of plays and that he always moved with the times.

CHAPTER-VII

THE CRAFTSMANSHIP AND POPULARITY AS A PLAY WRIGHT

Chilakamarti was of the firm opinion that every art form should be didactic in its own way. He made it very clear in a number of his plays that though the play was entertaining, it should finally convey a moral and try to put the people on the right path.

Art grows out of life. It is fed by life and as such it naturally reacts upon life. Whatever be the line of work, it stands primarily, on the field of ethics and then begins to create incidents and theme to establish the principles of ethics rather suggestively.

Since the play is a consummate art form, normally poets take to it only after gaining considerable experience in other forms of literature. But in Chilakamarti's case it was quite different. He attempted the play earlier than the novel and biography.

At the age of 22, he wrote *Keechaka Vadha* and that too not of his own accord, but at the request of his friend. After once agreeing to it, he used to do it with deep contemplation, keeping in view the requirements of the actors too. Here comes the question of principles of thematic construction and laws of dramatic technique.

Chilakamarti made a thorough study of the Sanskrit poetics as far as the techniques of drama were concerned. Accordingly he introduced *Nandi And Prastavana* i.e., prologue in the beginning and *Bharata Vakyam* i.e., epilogue at the end. As for the division of story into acts and scenes, he appears to have kept in mind the English plays of Shakespeare too

As far as the story of the plays are concerned, almost all the original plays of Chilakamarti contain classical themes and epic characteristics.

Keechakavadha, *Droupadi Parinayamu*, *Tilottama* and *Nala Natakam* have their themes adapted from *Mahabharatam*; *Chatura Chandrahasa* from *Jaimini Bharatam*; *Sreeruma Jananam Sita-Kalyanam* from *Ramayana*; *Parijatapaharanam* from the *Prabandha*

of Timmana and *Prasanna Yadavam* from *Harivamsa* and *Bhagavata Puranas*. *Gayopakhyanam* and *Harischandra*" from the Telugu poetical works of the middle ages like Nadendla Gopamantri's *Krishnarajuna Samvadani* and Gourana's *Harischandropakhyanam* respectively. *Bammera Potaraju* is an incomplete play like *Harischandra*. The theme of *Potaraju* is historical while that of *Harischandra* is mythological.

Taking into account, the plays translated from Sanskrit, the total number comes to fourteen. The earliest was *Parvatee Parinayam* of Abhinava Bana. This Bana was not the author of *Kadambari*, but a court poet of Vema Reddi of the Sixteenth century, holding the title of *Abhinava Bhattabana*.

The remaining thirteen plays are from '*Bhasa Nataka Chakram*'.

Pratima and *Ahhishekam* have their themes adapted from *Ramayana*; *Panchratnam*, *Madhyama Vyayogam*, *Duta Ghatotkacham*, *Karna Bharani*, *Duta Vakya* and *Uru Bhangam* are from *Bharatam*; *Bala Charitram* (the story of the birth and boyhood pastimes of Lord Krishna)-from *Hari Vamsa* and *Bhagavata Puranas*; *Pratijna* *Yugandharayanam* and '*Swapna Vasavadattam*' - from *Brihatkatha* and *Katha Saritsagara* containing the interesting episode of King Udayana. *Charudattam* and *Avimarakam* are semi social plays highlighting the sentiment of pure love. The former provided theme, to some extent, to Sudraka's '*Mricchakatika*' which is being staged abroad even to this day. *Vasantasena*, a charming pious lady of the prostitute community loves a poor pious and handsome youngman of Brahmin community. In *Avimarakam*, the hero-Avimaraka (killer of a demon named *Avi* and hence called *Avimaraka*) loves the lovely lady named *Kurangini*, the daughter of his own maternal uncle but owing to hurdles created by a saint's curse and other events, they undergo unpredictable troubles and intolerable separation and finally meet each other by the efforts of *Narada*. The last event of separation and reunion of the love-pair in this play of *Bhasa* seems to have impressed *Kalidasa*, as evident from his play *Vikramorvasheeyam* which contains similar incident of separation and reunion of the love pair- the valorous king *Puroorava* and the divine damsel *Urvashi*.

Because *Chilakamarti* was very much impressed by the unparelled creative genius and everlasting technical beauties exhibited in *Bhasa's* plays, he translated into Telugu the whole of *Bhasa Nataka Chakram*

slowly in about two decades and a half, while other works also were simultaneously being done.

The total number of Chilakamarti's plays-original and translated, including the incomplete, goes upto 27 or even more.

Spatial consideration forbids a discussion of all the plays at length but it would be in the fitness of things to give an outline considering the scope and limits of this monograph and to take only a couple of popular plays from the point of view of the contemporary people as well as the author. A brief note shall be furnished on the remaining plays.

If popularity among people is taken into consideration, *Gayopakhyanam* takes the first rank and if the author's opinion alone is considered. *Prasannayadavam* is to be taken into account. It is, therefore, desirable to discuss at least the popular one in greater detail to the extent possible. The former was written 15 years earlier than the latter.

GAYOPAKHYANAM (1890)

This play has a peculiar story. It is difficult to imagine animosity and war between the two intimate souls-the former being Paramatma and the latter being Jeevatma. We cannot imagine a conflict between God and his favourite devotee. But it so happens in the story with a wonderful twist, the root cause being very trivial.

Can we ever imagine that Hanuman picks up quarrel with Sreerama? It happened at the wonderful stroke of a poet's pen in Telugu.

As far as the Telugu plays are concerned *Ramanjaneya Yuddham* is a play written by Tandra Subrahmanyam on the analogy of *Gayopakhyanam* of Chilakamarti.

In fact, he is not the first to write a play under the title *Gayopakhyanam*. One Kondubhatla Subrahmanya Sastri did it in 1885. But this play was neither properly written and staged, nor was published and hence attracted no attention. The theme also underwent a few changes in contrast with that of the latest now in currency.

Now getting to know about the very theme, who is this 'Gaya' at all? A Gandharva (one of the few divine births) by birth and was a faithful devotee of Krishna. One fine morning-nay, it was the worst morning in his life-while going to *Brahmaloka* by *Vimana* (an airbus), chewing the betel leaf unmindfully spitted it out. The red coloured

chewings unfortunately fell into Krishna's coupled palms holding oblatory water to offer to the rising *Sun* God, chanting the Holy Hymn. Krishna thus blasphemously disturbed, grew wild and instantaneously took a vow that the culprit's head would soon be severed by his *Sudarsana Chakra* - the unopposed divine weapon. Poor Gaya having come to know of this, and on the trickish advice of Narada, goes and entreats Arjuna to save his (Gaya's) life, without informing him (Arjuna) of Krishna's vow. After Arjuna promises to save Gaya's life, then the latter reveals the details, to the utter dismay of Arjuna. However, having once given the word, he keeps up his word, till the end, despite the terrible war that flared up between him and his revered brother-in-law and protector-Krishna and ultimately Lord Shiva's interference to save the most dangerous situation with a solution agreeable to both.

Gaya's life was thus saved, following the soul-stirring events and sequences of drama and melodrama.

The sources of the plot are available neither in *Bharatam* nor in *Bhagavatam* nor in *Harivansa Purana*. If one digs deep, a similar story could be traced out in *Chitra Bharatam* or *Maruttaracharitra*. But in no way they seem to be sources of this plot. In Telugu, a number of poets of middle age onwards wrote works entitled *Krishnarjuna Samvadam*. Nadendra Gopamantri (Dwipada metre) Ramayamatya, Vellinti Subbayarya, Velicheru Venkata Ramapradhani, Kasturi Ranga Kavi (Dwipada metre), Obayamatya, Pochiraju and Dhenuvakonda Tiinmayya (Jangam Katha) are worth-mentioning authors of the same theme. Chilakamarti appears to have consulted Ramayamatya's poem containing two cantos, to a large extent and a few others to a limited extent. In Kannada also this story of *Krishnarajuna Yuddham* attracted a couple of writers like N.C. Kelker and Sadhupalli Chandrasekharakavi.

Keeping in view the scope of this monograph, it may not be necessary to draw comparison and contrast between the themes of all these works and that of Chilakamarti as it may not serve the present purpose. But one aspect should be made clear.

Chilakamarti named his play *Gayopakhyanam*, but not *Krishna rjuna Samvadam* or *Krishnarjuna Yuddham*. One Kondubhatta Subrahmanya Sastri's *Gayopakhyanam* (written in 1885) was staged at Rajahmundry by 'the Guntur Hindu Nataka Samajam'. Chilakamarti must have chosen this name in preference to others. Further, the title

Gayopakhyanam has a resemblance to that of Harschandropakhayanam and Chilakamarti who cared more for easy articulation and public convenience, must have naturally approved of the title *Gayopakhyanam*. This, in a way, makes Gaya the hero of the play and thereby adhering to the principles of plot and characteristics of hero as laid down in Sanskrit poetics and English dramaturgy.

In the *Prastavana* (introductory part) of the play the *Sutradhara* (Stage Director) says that the author wrote *Gayopakhyanam* named *Prachanda Yadavam* containing the story of a dispute between *Vasudeva* and the *Pandavas*. It appears that Chilakamarti had a liking for the compound word *Prachanda Yadavam* which was similar to that of *Prasanna Yadavam* a play written by him after a decade and a half.

The former means 'the story of Srikrishna-the fierce yadava king' while the latter means 'the story of Srikrishna-the gracious yadava king'. The former relates to Gaya while the latter relates to Narakasura. The compound words *Prachanda Yadava* and *Prasanna Yadava* are not as simple as *Gayopakhyana* and *Narakasura Vadha* from the point of view of common audiences. Chilakamarti, though retaining the former, substituted the latter with *Prasanna Yadavam*. The fancy of the author, of course, goes a long way in naming a play.

Gayopakhyanam is divided into five acts, as most of Chilakamarti's plays were done. The reason for this is simple. The principles of drama regarding the arrangement of plot make a mention of the five Sandhis in which the beginning, the prosecution, the prospect, the nearness of the result and finally the achievement of the desired goal are gradually worked out. These may otherwise be called (a) Exposition of the initial incident (b) growth of action to its crisis (c) the crisis, a turning (d) the resolution and (e) the catastrophe as W.H. Hudson makes a pyramidal representation of Freytag's analysis of drama plot. Freytag, of course, treats the first stage Exposition and initial incident as the next. (Hudson's 'An Introduction to the Study of Literature'-p.201)

Now taking these aspects with special reference to *Gayopakhyanam* of Chilakamarti, the initial incident is Gaya's spitting down the betel chewings into the palms of Krishna who takes a terrible vow of killing the culprit. Gaya finding no other way seeks refuge with Brahma.

The growth of action towards the crisis is evident from the helplessness of the trio-gods in protecting Gaya who on the advice of Narada decides to approach Arjuna.

Arjuna vows to save the life of the refugee as against the will of his revered brother-in-law Sri Krishna and this leads to the crisis. Gaya is still doubtful about his life though gaining some confidence on the strength of Arjuna's assurance. Later the negotiations by Akrura and Subhadra from the Pandava's side and Satyabhama, Rukmini and Devakidevi on behalf of Yadavas becoming futile, flaring up of war leads to resolution in which Lord Shiva is about to enter the scene to avoid all untoward incidents.

Shiva miraculously protects the life of Gaya and the disastrous war between Krishna and Arjuna is put to an end. The catastrophe is thus avoided for the common good.

After all, Gaya was not at fault right from the beginning as he did not commit the folly wilfully. It was a mistake done unwittingly. Hence he does not deserve to pay such a heavy price as being beheaded. In protecting him, there is natural justice. The poet also did full justice to the theme.

The dialogues and verses are some of the principal highlights of the play.

In the miserable plight of Gaya and in the protracted negotiations between Pandavas and Yadavas- particularly while writing the dialogue between Subhadra and Krishna and Arjuna and Krishna-Chilakamarti's pen flared like a flash.

There is, of course, a criticism against these dialogues that while playing to the gallery, the poet sacrificed the sublime nature of the great characters like Lord Sri Krishna, Arjuna and Subhadra etc. The poet has, in fact, a natural tendency to dilute the expression as far as possible, caring more for the common man who enjoys the idiom and proverb familiar to him in his daily life. This is the reason why the verses of Chilakamarti became very popular among the common folk.

An example from the dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna could be cited-

Arjuna: Dear Lord! while sending Subhadra and Akrura from our side to negotiate with you, I told them to convey to you that I prayed to you with folded hands touching your lotus feet. Despite all this, you are not good enough to excuse me.

Krishna: Alas! am I to excuse you?... you no longer require the help of Krishna and therefore disregard him. It is like burning the boat after crossing the river. Never did I think you would be so ungrateful.

'This kind of vain and arrogant prattle is not consistent with the noble and sublime character like Sri Krishna' remarked a veteran Literateur named Jayanti Ramayya Pantulu. In the play, during the course of the wordy duel Krishna goes to the extent of even kicking Arjuna without any restraint. This irreverent act on the part of the Lord must have led the critic to pass an adverse remark against this play.

Here an incident that has some relevance to this dialogue may be quoted.

Arjuna while blaming Krishna alleges that the latter did not hesitate even to kill his own uncle who affectionately extended invitation to him and such cruel deeds are strange to Pandavas. Kamsa, the maternal uncle of Krishna is referred to, here.

The poem opens with the lines

*"Alluda Rammani Aadaranbhuna Pilvahampu
Muamala Butti Champa Galame"?*

This poem was got by heart even by illiterate countrymen driving bullock carts. A friend of Chilakamarti-by name Potukuchi Subbayya, while going in a cart to some place asked the carter to sing some song to while away the time. The cartman at once sang the above vers² to the surprise of Subbayya who at a later date met Chilakamarti and narrated the pleasant incident to him.

This is just a specimen of the sort of popularity that the poet gained as a play wright.

The *Prahasanas* (broad farces) also gained similar popularity as they are farces catering to the needs of people from the point of view of entertainment as well as instruction. Before dealing with them it may be necessary to say a few words about the other plays of the poet.

OTHER ORIGINAL PLAYS

Though Chilakamarti wrote plays only at the request of his friends and admirers, he always tried to convey a message through these works.

His first original play- *Keechaka Vadha* conveys the message that unruly lustful and violent musclemen like the mighty 'Keechaka' the brother of the Queen of Matsyadesa where Pandavas with Droupadi spent one year in 'ajnatavasa' (living incognito) are sure to have a miserable death. Keechaka's unrestrained passion for a chaste woman like Droupadi put him to horrible death.

The second play *Droupadi Parinayam* is the story of the *Swayam-varam Of Droupadi* in which she marries the great archer- warrior, Arjuna who comes in the disguise of a *Brahmin* and exhibits his unparelled skill in archery. The message here is that Victory always goes to the skilled hero who abides by *Dharma*, the righteous conduct.

The third play *Sreerama Jananam* is the story of the birth of Rama intended to establish *Dharma* on the earth-the genesis of the great epic *Ramayana*.

The fourth is *Gayopakhyanam* already discussed in detail in this Chapter.

The fifth is *Parijatapaharanam* in which how the Polygamy of Krishna with his first two wives-Rukmini and Satyabhama whom Narada brought into the scene of rivalry, led Krishna to fight with his own elder brother Mahendra and fetch Parijata (A heavenly tree in the pleasure garden of Indra) to Satyabhama to fulfil her desire of demonstrating to the world that she was better loved by her husband. Chilakamarti's intention in writing this play was to instruct men and women, the evils of polygamy.

The sixth is *Nala Natakamu* in which Nala-the king of 'Nishadha domain' by providence or by foul play of the evilminded Kali, resorts to 'gambling of dice' and loses everything. Later by providence again, he regains his kingdom, wife and his original form. The message is that the vicious habit of gambling leads to any amount of danger and distress.

The seventh is *Seeta Kalyanam* in which young Rama along with Lakshmana, learning the art of archery under the great Seer- Viswamitra goes to the city of Mithila where Sita marries Rama after he exhibits his matchless skill in breaking the bow of Lord Shiva. The virtues of good learning and benefits of performing the same are highlighted in

this play so that the younger generations get inspired while the devotees of Rama enjoy the sight of His Divine powers.

The eighth - *Prasannayadavam* otherwise called *Narakasura Vadhu* contains five acts. Naraka becomes king of the Heaven and exhibits his lustful desire for Urvashi. Seers and sages, severely tortured by him, complain to Lord Krishna. In the fight between the Lord and Naraka, Naraka dies and his son becomes king by the grace of the Lord, who is a Yadava king. The title 'Prasanna yadavam' becomes meaningful because it contains the story of a graceful Yadava. While the evil-minded is severely punished, the good-natured are protected and suitably rewarded. Chilakamarti had a liking for this play.

The ninth is *Prahlada Charitram*. The severe penance of Hiranyakasipu inflicts punishment on Indra. Hiranyakasipu entrusts Prahlada to Chandamarkas for instruction. Their trials go in vain to distract the boy's attention from Lord Vishnu and finally Vishnu in the form of Narasimha (man with lion's head) kills Hiranyakasipu. These are the main points in the story. In this play, Chilakamarti, while depicting the characters of Chandamarkas, brings out the typical traits of the village school teachers of his times who punished the boys rather inhumanly. In his famous novel-'Ganapati' also, the village school teachers are depicted to be very rude towards the pupils. Despite the teacher's ignorance and untoward behaviour, some pupils become great by self-realisation. Similarly Prahlada's devotion to Lord Vishnu makes the boy very great. The playwright conveys this message rather impressively.

In the order of chronology *Chatura Chandrahasam* is the tenth play of Chilakamarti. The original story of this play figures in *Jaimini Bharatam*. While Dharmaraja's Aswamedha horse, protected by Arjuna was stopped by the great young warrior Chandrahasa, Narada narrates his story to Arjuna. Avoiding this reference the author makes a novel attempt to conclude the play with a tragic element, which the original story does not contemplate according to the norms of the Indian story. Bhagurayana, the evil-minded minister of Kuntaladesa tries to put an end to Chandrahasa, the prospective prince of the country. But during the course of his villainous activity the minister loses not only his life but also the life of his young innocent son, while the fortunate Chandrahasa becomes the unopposed king of the country. While death of the evil-minded minister gives relief to the people, the death of his

innocent and good-natured son rouses their feelings of sympathy, which is considered to be the characteristic feature of the tragedy. The message is that God saves good men. But the effects of bad parents on their children are inevitable.

The last of the original complete plays of Chilakamarti is the story of *Tilottama*, the eternal dancing damsel of Indra's court, created by Viswakarma, the divine architect. Sundopasundas, the two affectionate demon-brothers, becoming mad after her beauty, quarrel with each other and kill one other. How the uncontrollable passion is ruinous to people is the message conveyed through the play.

The other two plays *Harischandra* and *Potaraaju* which are incomplete manuscripts must have been begun early in 1946, the year in which the author passed away.

TRANSLATIONS AND THE LANGUAGE

As for the plays translated from Sanskrit, a brief note has already been furnished in this chapter itself. But one point which requires to be stressed is that the purpose of the translation is to enlighten those who cannot understand the original. Chilakamarti's translations are, no doubt, brilliant.

The present writer (of this monograph) translated *Pratima* and *Dootavakyam* of Bhasa into spoken Telugu for All India Radio, Vijayawada Station, a decade ago. In fact, Chilakamarti's translation was very helpful for adaptations of the plays to the A.I.R. for broadcast purposes.

As for the language, Chilakamarti wrote only in *Granthika* (language peculiar to books) in the same way as Panuganti Lakshmi Narasimha Rao did. In the year 1914, the question of using *Granthika* Or *Graniya* (colloquial) languages came up for discussion and a controversy raged over it. The Maharaja of Pithapuram who was always in favour of *Granthika* wanted that special lectures in favour of this mode of language should be arranged at Visakhapatnam which was the centre for staunch supporters of *Vyavaharika* (spoken) language. The four scholars selected by the Maharaja to deliver the lectures in support of *Granthika* were Chilakamarti, Puranapanda Mallayya Sastri, Panugunti Lakshminarasimha Rao and Kuchi Narasimham. At a meeting held there, Chilakamarti placed his arguments as a protagonist of

the *Granthika* style. This aspect will again come up in the last chapter of this monograph and here it is enough to note that Chilakamarti was all out for the simple *Granthika* which was easily understandable for common people. .

Now the *Prahasana* one of the ten forms of *Rupaka* (play) will be dealt with, to demonstrate how as a broad farce, it served the purpose of social reform.

CHAPTER-VIII

THE PRAHASANA (BROAD FARCE)
AS A MEANS OF SOCIAL REFORM

Prahasana in Sanskrit means a hearty, loud laughter coupled with mirth. It may also be for ridicule, a farce or burlesque produced by peculiarity in body, dress and talk. The Sanskrit poetics lay down certain rules for the *Prahasana* as one of the ten forms of the play. It contains one or two acts, the RASA (sentiment) being *Hasya* (humour). The theme may be fictitious. The hero may either be a Brahmin, or a king or a saint or a person of easy virtue. Other characters may be parâmour, belles, prostitutes, beggars and servants. Normally the *Prahasana* contains a social theme. Some of the worth-noting *Prahasanas* in Sanskrit are Jagadeesa Bhattacharya's *Hasyarnavam*, Somaraja Deekshita's *Dhoorta Nartakam* and Gopinatha's *Koutuka Sarvasvam* (MSS). One *Lambodara Prahasana* with the content and dialogues which were vulgar, obscene and indecent was also available in Sanskrit. Its authorship was unduly attributed to the great poet-Kalidasa and hence called *Kalidasa Prahasana*. It is believed that some obscure poet must have done this mischief. In literature, it is not uncommon that some writers write some objectional stuff and attribute the authorship of it to some famous poet.

In modern times Veeresalingam popularised the *Prahasana* form of the play to highlight the evils prevalent in the society. It is a short play in prose with a potential for good effect. It is always in the lighter vein. The resulting entertainment is totally meant for reforming the wrongdoer through ridicule.

In the West, there were a few French playwrights like Moliere and Voltaire who used this burlesque form, quite effectively, for mending the ways of the wrongdoers through humorous entertainment. Having studied their works, Veeresalingam used this literary form as a social satire to ridicule the evil practices. Thus he wrote as many as forty *Prahasanas* or even more.

Chilakamarti outdid him in this form of literature. The number written by him goes beyond eighty. It is not the number that counts. The content and the effect it has on the audiences are more important. Like those of Veeresalingam, these farces also were immensely enjoyed by people. Local allusions and topical references with which the public were familiar must have tickled them and mended them to the extent possible. This was the purpose for which the two literary giants attempted this novel genre in modern times.

As has already been mentioned, the *Prahasanas* of Chilakamarti could be broadly classified into a few groupings such as farces containing message, critical comment and so on. It is necessary to quote a few examples under these groups. A little overlapping here and there is possible as they are broad farces mainly intended to ridicule those who took to evil ways.

Like Veeresalingam, Chilakamarti also condemned nautch parties in marriages and other festive occasions. In those days people used to consider it a matter of prestige to invite professional dancing girls on all auspicious occasions for the entertainment of the invitees and also the onlookers. Chilakamarti was stoutly opposed to this vulgar practice and he made it a principle in his life not to visit the house of a nautch for any purpose.

In one of his *Prahasanas*—namely *Padaka Gadi Mucchatlu* (chit-chat in the bed chamber) Chilakamarti created a character of young groom who announces that if the nautch party is arranged he would not attend his marriage at all, as his classmates and students would tear him to pieces if he allows it. The groom's mother Meenakshamma is very keen about it. She says "We don't want devotional stories and the like; we are not sanyasins; this is a happy occasion of marriage; ours is not a mutt of Bairagees (a place where wandering religious mendicants reside); dancing girls are auspicious dieties. Nuptial ceremony without nautch party is not a nuptial at all. ('Nuptial' literally means 'marriage' and not 'intercourse' as is mistakenly understood) This rude argument of the groom's mother is summarily rejected by the groom himself.

The groom's action is exemplary to one and all.

The *Prahasana* is cent-per-cent instructive from the point of view of social reform.

There is another *Prahasana* entitled *Vollakai Tiruguta* which means

"Rambling for Votes". This reveals the tricks played by contesting candidates who deceive the voters by telling lies and making false promises. The journal *Desamata* edited by Chilakamarti got itself involved in many troubles by publishing articles criticising the then municipal administration and editors.

Not only the contesting candidates but also the voters were scathingly criticised by Chilakamarti. "The voters should not sell themselves for money. If they do so they are bound to go to hell where Yamadharma maraja doesn't spare them at all" said Chilakamarti in the Prahasana entitled *Yamadharma maraju Kaccheri* (The Court of Yama). Yama, listening to the words of Chitragupta (Yama's court accountant) and all the false promises made by the voters before they come to the hell says

"This old hell is incapable of inflicting punishment on these voters who cast their votes in other's names. A new hell with upto date equipment of more severe punishment should be opened for those guilty of impersonation. Regarding this, I shall talk to Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara."

A voter, on enquiry by Yama, boldly submits the truth to him thus:

"My name is Gopaiah. In the Voters' list of our ward, the name of one *Papaiah* who died some ten years ago was included. Since my name is not included here, the followers of the candidate paid me money, kept me in a locked room the whole night so that I might not go to other party's crowd and made me vote for their candidate. When I was asked to tell my name, I answered quietly and courageously- 'my name is Papaiah'".

Chilakamarti was ahead of his times. His forecast about the future also came true. Isn't the election scene nowadays still worse?

Dowry system, child marriages and a number of other social evils were most effectively presented in the farces to convey a message to the people.

Some of the titles of the farces may help to have an idea of the author - *Vara Dakshina* (Dowry to the grooms) *Pendlikodukula Dharalu* (The prices of grooms) *Oushadha Prakatanalu* (Advertisements of Medicines) *Goppa Vaidyudu* (The great Physician) *Gosai Chirkalu* (The Medical tricks of Mendicants) *Dambha Sanyasi* (The deceitful ascetic)

Gayyalī Gangamma (The peevish insolent woman-Gangamma) *Badhira Chatushtayam* (The four deaf persons) and a number of other *Prahasanas* reveal Chilakamarti's zeal for social reform and eradication of evil in the society.

In this chapter of 'Prahāsanas', it may not be out of place, to make a mention of *Navvulagani* (Fund of Laughter) with a brief extract from the text which is in the form of questions and answers.

Question: When does a richman become poor?

Answer: When he is forced to pay the property tax or compelled to give subsistence allowance to his widowed daughter-in-law or younger sister-in-law.

Question: When does an old man become young?

Answer: Invariably he becomes young when he loses his wife, or when he requires a government job.

While defining 'a fool', Chilakamarti provides an answer thus:

"A person who heckles others without knowing his own inability is one fourth fool;

A person who calls others fools, without knowing that he himself is a fool, is half fool".

These are some definitions offered by Chilakamarti.

In fact, a perfect fool is one who thinks that except himself everybody is a fool in this world. But a wise man always thinks that everybody is wise unless it is otherwise proved.

A goodman sees only goodness in others.

Chilakamarti with a robust sense of humour, dexterously creates broad farcical scenes to suggest to the audiences what is good in man.

Muktevi Bharati who gave an account of some of the above questionnaire in her thesis on Chilakamarti's works, opined that *Navvulagani* (two parts) could be included in the collection of *Prahasanas*

as most of the events narrated in it were like farces with subtle wit and sparkling humour.

Being endowed with the art of telling even ordinary everyday happenings in a humorous way, Chilakamarti like Charles Lamb, blended his humour with pathos. As an illustration, an incident is narrated here:

In the late nineties of the nineteenth century, 'the Visakhapatnam District Conference was held at Vizianagaram. On his way back, Chilakamarti along with the followers of Polavaram Zamindar stayed at Visakhapatnam in a mansion called 'Karumanchivari Haveli' of Kasimkota Zamindar, who was there at that time. Chilakamarti and the staff of Palavaram Zamindar felt happy that they were given a magnificent building as their lodge. Exactly at that time the Kasimkota Zamindar, all of a sudden rushed into the room, where Chilakamarti along with another young man of the staff stayed, gave a severe slap on the cheek of the young man, shouting at him "You bastard, get away from here". The young man, being thus honoured, ran away to escape any possible further danger. Chilakamarti was shocked and slowly on enquiry came to know that the revered Zamindar was in a mentally deranged condition. Chilakamarti thanked his stars that the unusual honour done to the young man was not done to him by the grace of God. To be on the safe side, however, Chilakamarti took all possible care to avoid such incidents during his brief sojourn there in the mansion.

While narrating this incident Chilakamarti, appeared to be pitying the mental condition of Kasimkota Zamindar. This pity blended with humour was the unusual quality of his wit which was found in English writers like Charles Lamb (*Essays of Elia*). In his novel *Ganapati* and in many of his *Prahasanas*, we find incidents where humour was blended with pathos. This in itself is a novel method in humorous writings of the day.

Are not wit and humour best medication for a pitiable society?

CHAPTER-IX

THE NOVELIST WITH A NOVEL OUTLOOK

Versatility may sometimes be an advantage as well as a disadvantage. Specialisation in any particular branch may become difficult. There are, of course, exceptions for this. Veeresalingam successfully tried his hand at a wide variety of literary forms in Verse and Prose. In prose, his *Rajasekhara Charitram* is considered to be the first of its kind in Telugu, though *Mahasweta* of Kokkonda Venkata Ratnam Pantulu and *Sri Rangaraja Charitra* of Narahari Gopalakrishnamma Chetti were written about six years earlier than the *Rajasekhara Charitram*. In fact, it is not the time that decides the merits of a work. As a form of novel, *Rajasekhara Charitram* excels the other two.

After sixteen years of the publication of *Rajasekhara Charitram* Chilakamarti had the occasion of writing *Ramachandra Vijayam* his first novel, not on his own but being encouraged by Nyapati Subba Rao Pantulu who made an announcement in the journal '*Chintamani*' in 1894 inviting *Vachana Prabandhas* (the name given then for a novel in the early days of Telugu prose fiction) for competition. Rules were clearly laid down for the same and subsequently clarifications sought by the participants were also given. They were advised to refer to the novels in English, and in Telugu those works of Veeresalingam pantulu-such as *Rajasekhara Charitram* which he wrote on the model of Oliver Goldsmith's '*The Vicar of Wakefield*'.

Chilakamarti had gone through both of these novels and found that *Rajasekhara Charitram* was neither a translation nor even a rough adaptation, but only a modest attempt to write a social story on the model of English novels. The very fibre and texture of this Telugu novel was found to be based on Hindu domestic life charmingly drawn and illustrated. Chilakamarti caught the spirit of the genre and attempted his *Ramachandra Vijayam* as a social novel and shared the first prize with one Goteti Kanakaraju whose *Viveka Vijayam* also stood first in adjudication.

Chilakamarti bagged the first prize consecutively for another two years in that series of competitions (1896 and 1897) for his two historical novels - *Hemalata* and *Ahalyabai*

In *Ramachandra Vijayayam*, Ramachandrudu-the hero of the novel was poor but extremely good and came up in life by his own efforts, despite many hurdles created by Sobhanachalam and Venkataratnam, the two rogues who played villainy against him. But Sarabharaju, a good honourable rich man helped Ramachandrudu and at the end gave him his daughter Parvati in marriage.

Chilakamarti presents before us an ideal young man who sets an example to younger generations through his sincere efforts to come up in life.

In conceiving a character of this kind the author appears to have been influenced by the characters like Oliver Twist and David Copperfield created by the famous English novelist Charles Dickens. Oliver Twist, a humble orphan boy, half starved drudge, despised by all and pitied by none was awfully deceived by a rogue-namely Bumble whose resemblance we find in Sobhanachalam of Chilakamarti.

Nicholas Nickleby of Dickens also seems to have had its impact on Chilakamarti while conceiving the characteristics of a schoolmaster. The Yorkshire school master was rather rapacious, brutal and utterly ignorant. Some of the worst schoolmasters like Sobhanachalam and Ganapati created by Chilakamarti were in no way inferior to the Yorkshire school master of Dickens. If a comparison is drawn between Ramachandrudu of Chilakamarti and David Copperfield of Dickens-Sobhanachalam and Venkataratnam of the former unhesitatingly compete with Micawber and Uriah Heep of the latter.

Ganapati is another social novel of Chilakamarti which received everlasting ovation from its readers who consider it as a first rate comedy. The hero Ganapati himself is an ugly, idle, ignorant youngman causing laughter by every act of his, in the novel, an extract from which is given hereunder.

"Small pox scars added piognancy to his queer and odd face. Take for example a black-faced monkey which has no tail. Think for a while that it is sucking milk from the breast of a woman,

comfortably sitting in her lap, or instead of sitting on the branch of a tree, it lies on a looselaced ticken cot. Think that it is squint-eyed bandy-legged dwarf. If you keep your mind steady for a while and concentrate on him in deep meditation, no doubt, Ganapati manifests himself to your mental perception.

His going to school was a big spectacle to crowds of people. He used to be taken to school with his hands and legs tied tight together like a ritual animal taken for holy sacrifice. Not even alphabets he could learn, despite all this. But with ease, he learnt the art of playing cards and stealing money from his own uncle's house and from others in the neighbourhood. His desire to ride a horse or at least an ass, himself being well-dressed in full coat, with gaiety and pomp to the sudden surprise and pleasure of his affectionate and innocent mother''.

His efforts for a marriage and becoming a teacher and later a cook, create in us not only laughter but also awe, wonder and sympathy. He inherited and imbibed all the great qualities (such as those described above) of his forefathers - describes Chilakamarti at length.

Ganapati's concept and behaviour of a school teacher is an indirect criticism levelled against bad teachers who spoil the pupils' career to a great extent.

''He smokes cigars awfully and sleeps on the floor amidst pupils who, if found noisy are bound to receive deadly blows from him. He brought canes from outside the village, even before he started the school. He never taught even an alphabet to them, but made the higher class students teach the lower classes with great discipline which headmasters of the kind used to do''.

This is another biting criticism against headmasters who never teach but manage things with their subordinates and sincere pupils.

We are, of course, reminded of the Yorkshire schoolmaster of Dickens, whom he introduces thus:

“Any man who had proved his unfitness for any other occupation in life was free without examination or qualification to open a school anywhere.”

The way in which Dickens described the teacher also reminds us of Ganapati's wicked form.

“He had but one eye and the popular prejudice runs in favour of two. The blank side of his face was much wrinkled and puckered up which gave him a sinister appearance specially when smiled. at which times his expression bordered closely on the villainous” (Nicholas Nickleby P.35).

Though Chilakamarti followed the techniques of Novel writing from English, he was always aware of the message to be conveyed through his novels. The message is that in any society youth should take the lead for the progress of the society and if there is degeneration and fall of morals among young people, it invariably leads to the degeneration and fall of nation.

Rajaratnam and *Vijayalakshmi* are the other two novels of Chilakamarti in which he deals with the problems of dowry and education of women. *Vijayalakshmi* is an incomplete novel. But to the extent written, it conveys the social reforms intended by the author. The heroine's father condemns child marriages. The author himself had bitter experiences of this sort in his own life. His younger sisters who became victims of child marriage must have provided him the inspiration to write this novel. His niece- Ravuri Subbamma, a young widow, prosecuted her studies under his very guidance. All these incidents, in some form or other, found their expression in his novels.

It is true that Veeresalingam was the pioneer of Novel writing in Telugu. But Chilakamarti gave a new look to this literary form by writing not only social novels but also novels with historical themes and a stray epic theme in '*Soundaryutilaka*'

THE HISTORICAL NOVELS

The Historical novels in particular made Chilakamarti much popular and he was called 'Andhra Scott'.

When we make a mention of Scott, we should admittedly accept, that 'despite his many drawbacks as an interpreter of history, he (Scott) would still remain a great historical novelist of England and it must not be forgotten that a sense of the importance of truth in historical fiction had developed enormously since his time'. (Hudson's, *An Introduction to the study of Literature*' 2.161)

True, that the writer who undertakes to rehabilitate the past has in a measure to accept responsibilities of the chronicler. Scott, therefore, occasionally provided in his prefaces and notes to the novels, some record of his sources and thus throws light upon his preparation and equipment for his task. He, however, never forgot to satisfy at once the claims of history and the claims of art.

Scott enormously influenced writers like Medows Taylor, the author of famous novels such as *Tippu Sultan*, *Tara* and *Chand Beehi* in English. Chilakamarti had avowedly admitted in his autobiography (P.228) that only after getting to know full details of these novels he was able to learn the art of writing the historical novel.

The story of Chilakamarti's *Hemalata* took place some time at the beginning of fourteenth century when Maharaja Lakshman Singh was only a boy for whom his paternal uncle Bheemsingh was the caretaker. Allahuddin was ruling the country from Delhi and his invasion on Rajasthan gave a great twist to the story which happily concluded with the marriage of Hemalata, the daughter of Janardana Singh, with the valorous hero Madan Singh.

The Villain-Rehman in this story resembles almost in all respects, the crooked 'Rahman' created by Tayler in his *Tippu Sultan*.

The claims of History as also the claims of literary art were equally satisfied in this novel and it was no wonder that Chilakamarti got again the first prize for this novel in the novel competition held by Nyapati Subba Rao Pantulu in the year 1896. The adjudicators were Veeresalingam, Vaddadi Subbarayudu and Achanta Sundara Ramaiah whose decision was unanimous.

The very next year Chilakamarti's *Ahalyabai* got the first prize.

The adventurous and most valorous Queen Ahalyabai, having entered into a dispute with Samaji Holkar, got involved initially in his conspiracy and finally establishes her supremacy as a successful Queen. Traitors like Doulatrao and patriots like Syamasundara Dutt on her side resumed the thread of action in the story of the novel. The traitors with the help of the leader of cruel gang of robbers and dacoits acted against Ahalyabai. But the adventurous Queen counteracts all their misdeeds with courage and conviction. This Queen's character has close resemblance with that of Chand Beebi in Taylor's novel. *Tippu Sultan* also might have influenced Chilakamarti in creating some of the sequences in *Ahalyabai* - observes Kottapalli Veerabhadra Rao (Influence of English over Telugu Literature P.495) But Chilakamarti's talent and acquirement render the novel look like an independent and original work.

Another historical novel *Karpoora Manjari* - the cream of Chilakamarti's talent as a novelist was serialised in the journal *Manorama* in 1906. Veteran scholars like Jayanti Ramaiah Pantulu and Kottapalli Veerabhadra Rao have appreciated this novel from the point of view of history being blended with fiction with an extraordinary craftsmanship of narration and style. *Karpoora Manjari* - the heroine of the novel was a beautiful princess laid up with a chronic disease which was miraculously cured by the Malva prince named Makaranda who married her at the end. But during the course of this happy ending, a number of events took place in which the most diplomatic Rudrabhattu played the prominent role. He was no less than Chanakya to the extent of unappeased animosity, but not in sober thinking and selfless services for a noble cause.

"His cruelty deserves the severest punishments.

There is nothing wrong if he is burnt alive. But the Holy Fire God becomes impure by touching this polluted and evil-minded rogue", says Madhuvana, a good character in the novel .

One is reminded of Shakespeare's Iago, while considering Chilakamarti's Rudrabhattu.

In fact there is a feeling among scholars that this *Karpooramanjari*

should have been concluded as a tragic novel which the author would not normally conceive.

The name of Makaranda appears to have been very much liked by Chilakamarti. Makaranda becomes the hero of another historical novel *Mani Manjari* belonging to the times of Vikramaditya ruling the country from Ujjayini, the famous capital. In his court, on one fine day, a discussion was opened on the topic of 'Chaste Wives'. Chandraketu, the king of *Lata Desa* assertively said there were no such women on this earth who could stand comparison with the ancient ladies like Sita, Anasuya, Arundhati etc. But Makaranda, the king of Vidarbha-whose Queen was Manimanjari, a pious lady, counterargued with Chandraketu that there were chaste wives on this earth itself, keeping in view the chastity of his own wife Manimanjari. Chandraketu said that he was prepared to be beheaded if Makaranda could prove it, failing which he should be beheaded. In the presence of king Vikramaditya, Chandraketu took an oath that he would prove in three months' time the adulterous nature of Manimanjari, the wife of Makaranda himself.

To fulfil his so-called oath the evil-minded Chandraketu went to the extent of spreading rumours against Manimanjari with the help of her unfaithful servant maid. Despite all his hectic efforts, Chandraketu miserably failed in his attempt to prove that Manimanjari was not chaste. It was all a big victory for Makaranda and chastity of his wife.

Chilakamarti's great respect for chaste women is again revealed in this novel, although the theme and its source are found in an English poem.

It is presumed that the impetus for the author to choose this theme must be from a long poem of Shakespeare-namely "The Rape of Lucrece" which contains soul-stirring events proving the chastity of a wife. It may not be out of place if an extract from "The Argument" of Shakespeare is quoted in his own words which preceded the poem.

Sextus Tarquinius, a cruel king of Rome went to besiege Ardea.
 "In his tent, one evening, the principal men of army met. In their discourses after supper, everyone commended the virtue of his own wife; among whom, Collatinus extolled the incomparable chastity of his wife Lucretia. In that pleasant humour they all

posted to Rome; and intending by their secret and sudden arrival to make trial of that which everyone had before avouched, only Collatinus finds his wife (though it were late in the night) spinning amongst her maids; the other ladies were all found dancing and revelling, or in several disports. Whereupon yielded Collatinus the victory and his wife the fame. At the time Sextus Tarquinius being inflamed with Lucrece's beauty, yet smothering his passions for the present, departed with the rest back to the camp; from where he shortly after privily withdrew himself, and was (according to his estate) royally entertained and lodged by Lucrece at Collatium. The same night he treacherously stealth into her chamber, violently ravished her, and early in the morning speedeth away.

Lucrece in this lamentable plight, hastily despatcheth messengers, one to Rome for her father, another to the camp of Collatine. They came, the one accompanied with Junius Brutus, the other with Publius Valerius; and, finding Lucrece attired in mourning habit, demanded the cause of her sorrow. She, first taking an oath of them for her revenge, revealed the actor and whole manner of his dealing, and withal suddenly stabbed herself.

Which done, with one consent they all vowed to root out the whole hated family of the Tarquins; and, bearing the dead body to Rome, Brutus acquainted the people with the doer and manner of the vile deed, with a bitter invective against the tyranny of the king; wherewith the people were so moved, that with one consent and a general acclamation the Tarquins were all exiled, and the state government changed from kings to consuls".

(The complete works of William Shakespeare- P. 1224 London & Glasgow-Collins clear-type press 1923)

According to the principles of Chilakamarti, the rape of a chaste woman, even by providence, should not be depicted through a work of

art. Further, the concept of tragedy is not acceptable in Sanskrit poetics although the very *liihasas* like Ramayana and Maha Bharata are themselves great tragedies from the point of view of their conclusion. Yet the general principle is that the work should begin auspiciously, continue auspiciously in the middle and conclude auspiciously. The principle seems to be similar to that of the three unities of the plot which are at times found artificial.

Telugu novelists took time to entertain tragic themes and conclude them with tragic elements.

But Chilakamarti, within the limitations of time and content opened new vistas, keeping in view his favourite ideal of social reforms even in historical novels where the author has little freedom.

Krishnaveni another historical novel of Chilakamarti confines its setting and action to the Telugu country-Vijayawada and Golkonda, the period being seventeenth century. Though the story is fictitious, incidentally Ramaraju, the hero of the novel narrates to Jagannathadasu the stories of Ganapatideva and Prataparudra kings of the Kakateeya dynasty. The unity of plot is wanting in this novel. Ramaraju who saved Krishnaveni from the dacoits ultimately marries her.

Suvarnaguptudu highlights the sentiment of faithfulness and honesty. The two brothers whom Suvarnagupta helped, tried to kill him while a dog saved him, by risking its own life. The dog was, therefore, better respected than the unfaithful kith and kin. The story was said to have happened during the period of Vikramarka.

Sapamu is another novel which reveals a slice of Telugu history relating to Rajakalinga Gangu and Bhimakavi of Vemulavada (Karimnagar District in Telangana at present) probably belonging to eleventh century. Bhimakavi, endowed with the powers of cursing, as well as protecting, exercises these powers on Kalinga Gangu who insulted him and later protects him when he repents for his folly.

Soundaryatilaka is a semi mythological novel containing stories relating to Krishna, Jarasandha, Bhima, Sisupala, Jayasena and Kalavati. The mythological characters are placed on par with fictitious characters like Soundarya Tilaka and Kalananda whose identity is difficult to be established.

Even Sir Walter Scott did the same and critics passed remarks fittingly.

In the case of characters like Krishna, Bhima etc., we cannot say they are not historical at one time or other. It might be twelfth century B.C. or even earlier. But still, the question of anachronism should not arise. Since novel comes under the literary form 'Prose Fiction', fancy and imagination are allowed to play their part.

Historical novels which were written in the later period, by Adivi Bapiraju, Viswanatha Satyanarayana and Nori Narasimhasastry also had an element of beautiful blending of real history with fanciful fiction. The art of novel writing is bound to accommodate such elements. Chilakamarti paved the way for it.

There are two more novels of Chilakamarti, of which one is *Sudha Saracchandram* and the other is *Dasi Kanya*. Both of them are translations from English novels-'The Lake of Palms' and 'The Slave Girl of Agra' written by Ramesh Chandra Dutt of Bengal.

In the first novel Saracchandrudu marries Sudha, a young widow. In the second, the psychology of an evil-minded slave girl serving in the harem of Mogul emperor Akbar, and the love story of Akbar's eldest son- Jahangir and Nur Jahan were described most fascinatingly.

Another Novel *Syamala* an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is unobtainable and hence it is not possible to offer any comment.

If we undertake a stock-taking of all the novels of Chilakamarti, the way in which he represented the society at large through the description of individuals, lives and conditions of meals hotels run by young and aged widows who sometimes had contacts with thieves, presents before us the true picture of the contemporary life.

While mirroring the contemporary life through his novels, he gave a novel out look to the literature to serve as a means for social reform.

CHAPTER-X

THE STORY-TELLER BECOMING A BIOGRAPHER

The story-telling is an art by itself and very few writers are blessed with proficiency in it. Even popular poets sometimes fail, by putting their hand unduly at the story-writing which requires a special talent. The advent of journals and magazines made the need for story - writing indispensable even during the last quarter of nineteenth century. There was a feeling even by that time that the coming form of fiction would be a long story which might shortly displace the novel.

Novel, of course, has its own advantages of exhibiting life in its width and depth for the very reason that it has a larger canvas than what the story provides, however long it may be.

The histories of saints with their spiritual attainments and the moral background of social reformers require to be introduced to common readers in a simple and easy style so that they are made known to a good number of people. The hustle of modern life also makes men impatient of reading the longer classical poems and bulky novels. With the advent of journals, magazines and dailies, stories gained more popularity than the poems and novels. A story, be it long or short, could be read in a single sitting and this facilitates the reader not to lose much of his time in the busy modern life. This situation had arisen as long ago as in the last century towards its end.

Further, the school text - books also needed stories of worthies told in an interesting way. Chilakamarti rose to the occasion and wrote a number of stories. Prior to his writing, Veeresalingam wrote brief lives of some Indian dignitaries like Raja Ram Mohun Roy and Iswar Chandra Vidya Sagar which were intended to be read by one and all. The lives of some rulers of the native states like Baroda and Mysore also were written with the same objective. The unequal, but unqualified distinction which Veeresalingam achieved in giving an account of his own life was hardly found in the brief lives written by him on the Indian notable personages or, for that matter, even in his History of the Telugu Poets. Considering all these facts, it has to be stated that Chilakamarti

successfully tried his hand at the lives of many great men in the form of stories.

As a brief account of Chilakamarti's stories and biographies of great men was already given in chapter four, here it is enough if a few illustrations are given with a note on the purpose for which they were written.

Chilakamarti had a good grasp of many matters including public affairs and political administration. The purpose of his translating into Telugu Tod's 'Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan' was to enlighten our school children and elders on a number of social and economic issues. In one of the stories King Rana sticks on to the principle that the expenditure should not exceed income. He was prepared even to forego some of his culinary comforts, if the tax collections did not allow it. Normally the Rana used to take curd, mixed with sugar. One day the sugar was not served. The minister explained to Rana that the village set apart for sugar, was given away by him. Rana saying only a single word "Just", finished his repast without sugar being added to his curd.

All the 24 stories of Rajasthan convey some moral or other so that the younger generation was very much inspired and was always looking forward to further publications of such stories by Chilakamarti.

His *Bharata Kathamanjari* containing 19 stories was much more instructive as every story was more fascinating than the stories of *Hitopadesa* and the like. In the story of *Parrot And The Hunter* the hunter attained *Moksha* (redemption) and the author says, because his soul was purified by being burnt in the fire of real repentance.

Chamatkara Manjari which contains 48 stories is a wonderful collection of biographical stories, the narrative style of which achieves a tempo that sustains the readers' interest from beginning to end. The author does not seem to be purposefully dramatising any event but simply narrates the life story of the great person to convey the intended message.

Take for example the biography of 'Bhartrihari'. He was a king, who renounced all his kingdom, became a saint - poet and composed 'Neeti satakam'. The reason for his renunciation was his own foolish behaviour towards his noble queen.

One day, when a young woman, tied to her husband's dead body,

was taken to the burial ground for being burnt, Bhartrihari's queen remarked "Is it necessary to compel the wife that way?". Bhartrihari sharply reacted to this and thought that if he himself died, his wife would not observe *Saha Gamanam* (SATI). With this evil idea, he went to a forest with the pretext of hunting and sent word to the queen that the king died during the course of the hunting. The moment the sad news reached her, she was shocked and automatically died. Having come to know of this, Bhartrihari then realised that a wife who heartily loved her husband, would naturally die of shock at the very news of his death and this must be the meaning of the Queen's casual remark on that day.

This shocking incident in the life of king Bhartrihari made him renounce all worldly comforts and become a saint-poet.

This story conveys two morals from the standpoint of social reform. The first is that man's unwarranted suspicion about a woman often leads to her death. The second is that the age-old cruel practice of Sati should be totally condemned.

The other stories in this volume are no less instructive than this.

Chitra Kaiha Gucchan, *Vinodamulu* and *Nanyula Gani* very well establish Chilakamarti as the Prince of farcical stories. Each story or incident in these works is a *Prahasanam* by itself and one may even appreciate if they are tagged on to the volumes of his *Prahasanas*. But basically they were stories woven with techniques of narration which was a novel attempt in those days.

These techniques were employed by Chilakamarti even in writing Biographies.

Biography is indeed a branch of regular history. In it, the individual's life should be narrated as faithfully as possible. The biographer, therefore, should function both as an historian and as a portrait-painter. He draws inspiration from the lives of great men and develops instinctive desire to narrate their life history as they naturally distinguish themselves from the masses of the country and stand head and shoulders above them.

Biographies of great men written by Chilakamarti come under this category. These great men belong to Bengal, Maharashtra and the South representing a wide spectrum of life-styles.

The role played by Raja Ram Mohun Roy, Eswara Chandra Vidyasagar, Pandit Sivanath Sastry and Kesavachandra Sen in the field

of social reform are memorable and Chilakamarti had great respect for them. Widow marriages, women's education, and upholding of the principles of *Brahmo Samaj* were given top priority in writing these Biographies. Child marriages which became the worst social evil were condemned outright by Michael Madhusudana Dutt whom Chilakamarti admired as one of the great men who broke new ground in the field of social reform.

In *Nanda Charitra* the miserable life of the oppressed classes-particularly that of the Harijans-was described in detail. In South, these out-castes were prohibited from working in the streets where the upper classes lived.

The biography of *Samartha Ramadas*, the spiritual Guru of Shivaji attracted Chilakamarti very much. He says "we know our Ramadas of Bhadrachalam, (a devotee of Rama), but not that great soul whose teachings made the Maharashtra hero, protect this country from the danger of spiritual degeneration. It is this spirit which inspired me to write his biography for a better understanding by our people."

And similarly the message of Guru Nanak also requires to be conveyed to one and all."

With this kind of inspiration and innate urge from within that Chilakamarti wrote the biographies of great souls which are everlasting contributions to the Telugu Prose.

Even while translating, he took every care to see that the piety of great devotees was not tampered with, by improper words, in case they were used in the originals. For example, in the story of Rana Kumbha, the original writer-C.J. Tod, while giving an account of Meeradevi, wrote that her history was a romance and her excess of devotion exhibited at every shrine of the favourite deity-Krishna-gave rise to many tales of scandal. The last few words of scandal are blissfully forgotten in Chilakamarti's translation as his tender heart with all reverence for the lady devotee, does not allow him to translate the words "tales of scandal".

Not only in this case, in other contexts also, when a reference has to be made about women, particularly the widowed women, he does not hesitate to alter the originals of great poets like Bhasa. In 'Swapna Vasavadattam' there is a reference to the creeper (used for medicine) named 'Avidhava Karanam'. Chilakamarti deliberately avoided the

word 'Avidhava' and translated it as auspicious creeper used as medicine. In some other context when the son-in-law enters the royal bath room duly led by auspicious women, in the Sanskrit original Bhasa again used the word "Avidhavah". Here also Chilakamarti avoids this word in translation and uses only auspicious women. This shows that Chilakamarti as a true reformer like Veeresalingam, revolted against the very idea of 'Vidhava (widow) and as a matter of principle he felt that it should not be used in books indiscreetly in these times. Muktevi Bharati in her well-written thesis on "The Literary service of Chilakamarti" (P.139) makes these observations with a sense of judicious propriety.

Though there has been a little deviation in relating an incident from the plays in this chapter, meant exclusively for stories and biographies, it may be borne in mind that the attitude of Chilakamarti, as social reformer, does not deter him from making necessary alterations even in the translations of great classics. His literary endeavour and social reform invariably went hand in hand.

His autobiography is a sparkling testimony for the same.

CHAPTER-XI

THE HUMAN DOCUMENT OF A LITERARY CHRONICLER

On 31 December 1914, the Indian National Congress met at Madras under the presidentship of Justice Narayan Ganesh Chandavarkar of the Bombay High Court and discussed ways and means for the uplift of the oppressed classes-particularly the scheduled classes.

Chilakamarti Lakshmi Narasimham also participated in the meeting. As a follower of Veeresalingam, the yeoman services rendered by Chilakamarti for the education of women, widow marriages, condemnation of child marriages and establishment of Harijan schools were being appreciated by a good many people even by that time. The missionary zeal with which he served the scheduled classes by starting special schools for them was commended at the meeting of the Indian National Congress. The fact that as a mark of respect for such services by Lakshmi Narasimham, grateful Harijans like Venkanna and Markandeyulu named their sons after him at a later day, should not be forgotten. Despite all this, Chilakamarti never felt proud of these services; instead, he was more modest than ever before.

BLIND BUT AN EYE-OPENER TO OTHERS

At the National Congress meeting he humbly submitted to the chair "Sir, I am a blind man; I did this little work; I could not do more".

Justice Chandavarkar was much pleased by his exceptional modesty and respectfully holding him by hand, said- "Shake hand! Mr. Narasimham,

You are not blind; we are all blind".

From incidents like this, we have to infer that his modesty was only an outward expression of what he felt in the inner recesses of his heart.

While doing his duty, he never expected encomiums from others. When he received help from others-however meagre it was-he always acknowledged it and remained grateful to the benefactor forever.

He believed in the maxim that service to man is service to God. His whole life was an example to this maxim. His autobiography bears testimony to this.

As such a man, devoted to the service of his country men, he manifests himself throughout his autobiography. Neither overstatements with self-praise nor understatements with undue modesty mar the beauty of his passionless life - story.

MAN OF INTEGRITY

The human qualities, as brought out in this matchless work of Chilakamarti, are quite exemplary. Right from the beginning of his childhood he showed great respect for his parents and affection for the youngsters. When he knew that a particular action was wrong, he would never do it, nor would he allow others to do it. He was a man of integrity and strong convictions.

In his boyhood days when he found that his father and paternal grand-mother were unkind towards his mother, he felt very unhappy. When his father was beating his mother, he used to weep. Even during the period of her pregnancy and advanced months, his mother had to do unbearable and endless domestic work which pained him much. When his elder sister-Subbamma, a very young girl, was married to an old man, his mother shed tears and this made the young lad-Narasimham of five years shed tears in unison. Subbamma passed away at a very young age. Chilakamarti remarked that it was, a blessing in disguise for her, as she was relieved of the ignominy of leading the life of a young widow at a later stage. When his wife Venkayamma died of heart attack in 1930, he recollected her services as partner in his life for about 32 years and the way she helped him throughout her life, treating all people as her own children since she herself was not blessed with a child. She looked after many of the kith and kin. When Chilakamarti's nephew (second younger sister's son) a boy of 13 months died, he was very unhappy since he thought that this boy would at least relieve his wife from the grief caused by her barrenness. During his lifetime of 78 years he saw deaths of dozens of his close relatives, both young and old. As a poet and philosopher he developed an attitude of detachment which made him never to forget his duty as the head of a family and humble servant of the society at large.

THE SEED OF SOCIAL REFORM

The services rendered by him to the society commenced from a self-introspection. At the age of five, his thread ceremony was performed and the Hymn of *Gayatri* was taught to him. One day while he was playing, he taught this Hymn to a friend of his—a barber boy. An elderly brahmin who happened to witness this, grew wild. It perplexed young Chilakamarti, and it became a big question to him as to what mistake he committed by teaching the hymn to his playmate. The very seed of reform began to sprout into a plant for future action in the young Chilakamarti's heart.

He had little faith in religious rituals. Even while performing the monthly and annual ceremonies in remembrance of his father's death, he did them only for the satisfaction of his elders and relatives. A radical change in his attitude towards the rituals was noticed even in his late twenties and early thirties.

In the year 1899, M. Ramachandra Rao, a married school boy of 15 years died all of a sudden while swimming in the river Godavari. Three families related to the boy were weeping. People who were engaged in the profession of carrying dead bodies to the burial ground began to bargain with the bereaved inhumanly about the amount of payment to them. Chilakamarti, sharply reacted to this, offered to carry the body with the help of a few friends. As long as his sight permitted, he was rendering services of this kind on a number of occasions. He was first and foremost a humanitarian.

In fact, those were the days when foreign-returned brahmins were not allowed to dine with other brahmins. It actually happened in the case of Tanguturu Prakasam himself when he returned from England after his studies in Law. On the happy occasion of his arrival, Chilakamarti attended a dinner, arranged in the house of Rayavarapu Rama Murty. A few friends also attended the dinner.

This incident led to a great commotion in the town as it was considered to be an awful sin to dine with those who went to foreign countries, undertaking journey by the seas. The matter, after being discussed at length by the orthodox brahmins, was reported to Swami Sri Sankaracharya of Abhinava Virupaksha Mutt. *The Satyavadin* journal gave wide publicity to this incident. The Swami's office issued notices to Prakasam, Chilakamarti and the others, charging them with

religious lapses, supposedly committed by them. Chilakamarti replied suitably but the Swami was not satisfied. The idea of taking this issue to court was entertained but was dropped because on other occasions, such as widow marriages, the High Court did not favour the Swami and inflicted punishment on him. Sometime later, a meeting was held in the local temple which the Swami attended after he was taken in a procession on an elephant with all fanfare. Though the Swami was again furnished with suitable replies by the local lawyers and others, he was not satisfied and a heated arguments took place which led to a sort of minor skirmish making the Swami bolt away quietly from the scene through the back door of the temple.

Chilakamarti spoke on the occasion, putting forth his arguments most convincingly since the actions of the Swami and his followers were not justified. If the Swami with all his erudition and sense of judgment could convince him, he would have appreciated him. The narrow thinking pseudo-religious scholarship and undue exercise of highhanded power on others by these heads of peethams made Chilakamarti often grow impatient with them.

UPHOLDING THE RIGHT CAUSE

He always supported the right cause. When Veeresalingam was involved in court cases, during the course of his social reform movement, Chilakamarti stood by his side, till he came out victorious. D. Syamarao, a young teacher, wrote in a journal, alleging that in the widow refugee centre run by Veeresalingam, one Tamilian in the disguise of a lady entered the institute and was spoiling the widows by his illegal contacts with them. The author of the article used an epithet to the supposed culprit as *Punya Jana* which had a double meaning of 'demon' as well as 'goodman'. On personal enquiry Chilakamarti came to know that it was a baseless allegation. When a criminal case was filed by Veeresalingam against the so-called author of the article who was imprisoned and fined for his crime, Chilakamarti felt very happy that he could contribute his mite by furnishing the required information to the lawyers of Veeresalingam, his beloved mentor. On another occasion, when old Veeresalingam himself was alleged to have misbehaved with a lady, Chilakamarti, after careful enquiry into the matter, himself appeared as a witness in the court and saw that the pious reformer who sacrificed a lot for social reform, was acquitted and the mischievous culprit was

duly punished.

When Chilakamarti found aberrations in the behaviour of even bigwigs in the society, he did not hesitate to give them the proper advice. The zamindar of Polavaram who had great sympathy and respect for Chilakamarti was found to be indulging in the questionable activities such as loose living. With all good intentions Chilakamarti advised the Zamindar to mend his ways by getting rid of such bad company. On the advice of Chilakamarti, the zamindar mended himself to some extent. Further, he agreed to start a literary journal *Saraswati* under his editorship. To assist him in editing, Chilakamarti was being paid Rs.30/- p.m. by the zamindar and later when there was a difference of opinion between the two, the financial help was stopped once for all to Chilakamarti who never felt sorry for it.

SELF RESPECT

Self-respect was one of the major attributes of Chilakamarti. He never yielded to men of pomp and power who unduly tried to exercise their power and authority on him. There were a number of instances where he stood his ground firmly despite pressures from above to commit irregularities. This was very much appreciated by the virtuous. The rich educated people like Satyavolu Lakshmipati offered free services to the school started by Chilakamarti. But an Assistant Inspector of schools, Md. Azam Saheb rubbed on the wrong side with the grudge that Chilakamarti did not give him due respect. An irregular order of the Inspector changing the examination centre of Chilakamarti's schools, to a rival school ruffled up the spirits of the latter who with all restraint politely requested the Inspector to change the order. The Inspector flew into a rage and went to the extent of threatening to shoot him. Chilakamarti smiled at the arrogance of the officer and kept quiet. The officer's rude behaviour and subsequent loose talk with a superior officer at a drama performance, not only cut the former to his size, but also brought about his transfer from the district. The officer who came in his place made a special visit to Chilakamarti's school and retained the examination centre there itself. Everybody felt that Chilakamarti kept up his dignity and self-respect.

THE KICK FOR LITERARY RETORT

In the field of literary criticism, Chilakamarti did not spare the unjust and mischievous critics. When he came across such persons, he immediately retorted with the same art of pun and the same degree of mischief, but of course, with a little repentance at the end. In the year 1905 Goteti Kanakaraju, a scholar in English, and a disciple of Veeresalingam wrote an article on *Bhagavatgita* and got it published. The author-Kanakaraju did not sign his full name but just put a single letter 'K' in its place. On this article, the criticism of Pemmaraju Seetaramayya was published in the next issue. While offering the criticism, the author repeatedly wrote 'Ee ke' (This 'K'). The word 'Eeka' in Telugu means 'a piece of hair' - (a feather normally of a bird's wing). This was indirectly insulting Kanakaraju by calling him 'a piece of hair'. Chilakamarti thought that this criticism was uncharitable and that it required a counter. He, therefore, published his criticism in *Satya Vadini* using an abbreviated form of 'Pe yya' to Pemmaraju Seetaramayya, bringing together the first and the last letters (according to Sanskrit grammar this is called the principle of *Pratyahara*). The word 'Peyya' in Telugu means a heifer or a female calf. The purpose of Chilakamarti in writing thus, was to make Pemmaraju realise his mistake. The purpose was served.

POWER OF RETENTION

Even in his early twenties Chilakamarti exhibited his talent as an *Ashtavadhani*. An *Ashtavadhani* is one who performs the art of *Ashtavadhanam*. Extempore versification along with versatile scholarship and display of ready wit are the main features of *Avadhanam*. If the *Avadhan* answers simultaneously the questions of eight persons, it is called *Ashtavadhanam* and if the questioners are one hundred the *Avadhanam* is called *Satavadhanam*. Chilakamarti exhibited the former at two places-Dhavalaswaram and Rajahmundry. *Avadhanam* requires the capacity for grasping at the first glance. This is what is called *Ekasandha Grahanam*. This special faculty helped him to get by heart many classics at a single reading and retain the content by an extraordinary power of memory. In the year 1896, Veeresalingam obtained a manuscript copy of *Uttara Harivamsam* of Nachana Somana from The Tanjore Maharaja Serfoji Saraswati Mahal Library with the help of the then District Judge-Hamnet. The work gained great popularity even

before it was published since scholars of repute, like Chinnayasuri and Bahujanapalli Sitaramacharulu praised it as a better work than that of *Kavitrayam*, the three authors of Andhra Mahabharatam. Chilakamarti could not, therefore, resist the temptation of reading the work even before it was released. Veeresalingam would not allow others to have a look into it as it was its first publication. Chilakamarti, therefore, stealthily managed to get it, form by form, from the press, with the help of its manager, Kopalle Seshagiri Rao, who was his friend and got it by heart. Later when Veeresalingam, presented a printed copy to Chilakamarti, he told him that the whole text was in his memory. On further enquiry by Veeresalingam he revealed to him the fact with a request to excuse him. The giant literateur just smiled at the young literary heir of his and left the matter rest there.

A similar incident occurred in the case of *Veni Samhara Natakam* of Vaddadi Subbaryudu. This work also was printed in the same *Viveka Vardhani Press* of Veeresalingam and Chilakamarti could get it by heart even before the printed copy was released. He had great respect for Vaddadi who once tested his retentive power and called him a powerful living camera in appreciation of his retentive powers.

It is this retentive memory which made Chilakamarti dictate the whole of his autobiography to a scribe, with full particulars of dates, facts and figures relating to a period of 75 years. He was grateful to the Almighty for having blessed him with this unusual faculty.

CRITICAL ACUMEN

In the matter of publication of manuscripts, one more important anecdote testifying Chilakamarti's critical acumen requires to be narrated here.

In the year 1908, Setti Lakshmi Narasimham of Visakhapatnam sent a printed book of poems entitled *Rasikabhilashamu* to Chilakamarti's journal *Manorama* for review. In the preface to the book it was written that the palm leaf manuscript of this new work of *Mahakavi Srinatha* was discovered in the house of a *Vaishnava Brahmin* at Simhachalam and was carefully deciphered by Setti Lakshmi Narasimham.

But on careful examination Chilakamarti found that under any circumstances, the work was not that of Srinatha, but could only be that of an intelligent and crooked modern writer who stooped to attribute its

authorship to great Srinatha of Telugu literature, Chilakamarti published his confirmed opinion in the columns of his 'Manorama'. Setti Lakshmi Narasimham got very angry with Chilakamarti and sent him a small printed book in which he reaffirmed his considered opinion showing a series of evidences in support of his argument that the work belonged to none else than Srinatha. While writing these lines he unwisely and irrelevantly used certain words of uncharitable reprimand, conveying his opinion that because Chilakamarti was blind, he could not find out the truth.

Chilakamarti was wonder-struck at these words and felt, it was true he was blind, but not so blind as to refuse to see the truth.

After some time, Raja Vikramadeva Varma went over to Rajahmundry during the *Pushkaram* (Twelve years) days for a Holy dip in the Godavari and took the trouble of visiting Chilakamarti's residence in the night. During the course of their talks the Raja congratulated him for having discovered the truth relating to *Rasikabhilasham*.

In addition to Raja Vikramadeva Varma, another gentleman-Boddu Ramaiah, a resident of Visakhapatnam who was also a friend of Setti Lakshmi Narasimham confirmed the above opinion. Ramaiah had a book shop at Rajahmundry and now and then used to meet Chilakamarti. Incidentally the gentleman told Chilakamarti that his friend Setti Lakshmi Narasimham himself wrote *Rasikabhilasham* in his presence and observed that it was miraculous on the part of Chilakamarti to discover the truth.

After narrating this incident in his autobiography (P.424-26) Chilakamarti just said that he gained peace of mind since his criticism brought out the truth. This should be the spirit of a true critic.

While narrating this incident Chilakamarti disclosed not only the truth about the authorship of the work, but also the psychology of contemporary poets and critics. The critical acumen, and the other striking merits of Chilakamarti in narrating the autobiographical details are praiseworthy.

PROFOUND NATURE

Right from his boyhood, Chilakamadrti was never in the habit of rebuking or reprimanding others. Despite his differences of opinion even with the members of his family, he never used to utter a harsh word

against them, but simply kept quiet and abstained from taking food. He behaved in the same manner even with his parents. In the field of literature too, his temperament was such that he never entered into a controversy with others unless he was rubbed on the wrong side or badly provoked.

In general, he was considered to be a good boy. But there were occasions when he was punished by his elders. One of the occasions was his excessive interest in playing cards. He used to play very secretly but somehow it came to the notice of his elders. Most of his friends used to smoke cigars awfully and tried their best to bring him also into their fold, by forcibly puffing the smoke into his mouth and nostrils. Despite all this, he did not yield to them and never was he addicted to smoke in his life.

STUBBORN BUT JUDICIOUS

When he was a boy of 14 years, the Dharwar troupe was enacting plays in a drama hall constructed by them. The performances used to be very entertaining and captivating. Tallapragada Chalapati Rao, a friend of Chilakamarti who had a few relatives in the troupe used to go to almost all the performances without purchasing the ticket. There was no need for Chilakamarti also to purchase the ticket as his friend used to take him along with him without ticket. But at one stage Chilakamarti did not like this habit and bluntly refused to accompany his friend. The angry friend pulled Chilakamarti holding his legs in such a way that the bamboo mat on which he lay, hurt him severely on his back. This is one instance for his stubborn nature, coupled with righteous indignation. But Chilakamarti did not forget the goodwill with which he was invited to the drama performances by Chalapati Rao. It was only because of him, Chilakamarti gratefully acknowledged, that he evinced great interest in the plays which at a later stage made him a popular play wright.

SENSE OF GRATITUDE

The number of persons to whom Chilakamarti expresses his gratitude in his autobiography is amazing. The list runs to pages and pages. While expressing his sense of gratitude, Chilakamarti does it whole-heartedly, irrespective of the status of the person whose help he

acknowledges. In some of the reminiscences of his boyhood, how gratefully he acknowledges the wide knowledge of folk songs of that young widow-Peddada Narasamma, whom the villagers affectionately called *Appai*! How melodiously she used to sing those narrative songs containing peculiar stories of Maha Bharata and Ramayana! How faithfully Chilakamarti served her not hesitating even to carry curries and pickles prepared by her to her women friends, at her beck and call! Was it not but to gain the most bountiful benevolence of that sonorous songstress! How fancifully she sang the story of *Lakshmanadevara's Laughter*! A world of wonderful epic stories created by her inspired the young mind of Chilakamarti to write innumerable stories at a later stage.

SEASONED SPEAKER

The lectures of great orators influenced him a lot. The very mention of the names of Sir Raghupati Venkataratnam Naidu, Pandit Sivanath Sastry, Surendranath Banerji and Anandamohun Bose inspired him a lot. Venkataratnam Naidu's exhilarating exhortations on social purity, dancing girls' marriages, Nautch parties in temples and other celebrations were soul-stirring inspirations to Chilakamarti. He did not find words to describe the depth of their meaning, symmetry of words and the wonderful speed of the lecture!

Sivanath Sastry's speech was a little different from that of Naidu. The latter's speech 'resembles that of Lord Krishna's flute song. Stones melt and flow. Stump trees sprout out instantaneously! Bepin Chandra Pal's speech is no less effective and at times more moving and heart-rendering' according to Chilakamarti. 'The lectures of Anandamohun Bose were indescribable. The melody of his voice and the depth of feeling were unusual' says Chilakamarti. "When Surendranath Banerji with his iron lungs and bell-metal throat, roars like a rainy cloud, can anybody stand without getting his soul drenched in the torrential downpour of the speech?"

This is how Chilakamarti went into raptures and ecstasies when he listened to great orators. The influence of these speeches had a great impact on his own oration. He was not in the habit of reading papers, because of his blindness. All his speeches were extempore and delivered at a high speed. He imbibed many more qualities of the great speakers, literateurs and reformers. He was, therefore, highly grateful to them.

Is not gratitude a blessed virtue by itself? It was this sense of gratitude which made him a seasoned speaker of repute. Sense of prospective retrospection was another great quality which rendered him the wide perspective of unity in diversity.

CHAPTER-XII

**A PROSPECTIVE RETROSPECTION
FOR UNITY IN DIVERSITY**

It is indeed the responsibility of a writer to see that his works are not only entertaining but also instructive. There are no two opinions in this regard, both from the point of view of the oriental and occidental writers. In one form or other almost all the writers, from times immemorial, made it clear that their works were intended only for the common good of man.

At the dawn of the modern age, writers chose the career of social reformers too. Crusaders like Veeresalingam took the plunge into the gushing rivers of reform and launched vigorous propaganda in a row with the oars of their powerful pens. When Veeresalingam was in the first row, Chilakamarti was in the second. When Veeresalingam was the path-finder, Chilakamarti was a harbinger of the new era. When Veeresalingam was the pioneer and the commander, Chilakamarti was a militant follower and a soldier in the frontline.

Both were always ahead of their times and envisaged enlightened generations after themselves. Their introspection was but retrospection. Their retrospection was but prospective.

Chilakamarti, while concluding his autobiography in the year 1946, allocated a few pages for *Simhavalokanam* (P.P. 623-47). *Simhavalokanam* literally means the all pervasive 'look of lion'. The lion sitting at the top of the mountain looks around and makes a survey of the whole wild life-not always for its prey but to have a grasp of the surroundings and then proceeds further. The compound word *Simhavalokanam*, therefore suggests a meaning of retrospection with an all-pervasive look like that of a lion. Chilakamarti's name is *Narasimham* which connotes 'Man looking like a lion'. In the last chapter of his autobiography he reviewed the previous chapters and made invaluable suggestions regarding the future prospects of the country. His retrospec-

tion is, therefore, prospective for generations to come.

He stressed on five points, mainly concerning (1) Organisations for social reform (2) problems pertaining to women (3) fine arts and language (4) the oppressed classes and the religion and (5) the principle of unity in diversity.

Though the author emphasised these points about half a century ago, they hold good even today. In fact, they are more relevant than ever before since the conditions have worsened now.

SOCIETIES OF SOCIAL REFORM

Chilakamarti made an observation that in good old days, there used to be 'Social Reform Societies' along with 'Political Organisations'. Every year, the district level political conferences together with 'the Social Reform meetings' used to be held. In the early forties of this century these district level political conferences were almost dispensed with and the social reform meetings also gradually followed suit. Chilakamarti felt the dire need of reviving at least the social reform meetings since social problems still remained unsolved.

When Veeresalingam started propagation of social reforms, Chilakamarti was very young. The following were some of the reforms Veeresalingam contemplated:

- 1) Govt. officials should not indulge in bribery.
- 2) Nautch parties should not be arranged on the occasion of marriages.
- 3) Bridegroom's party should not harass the bride's party with demands of dowry etc.
- 4) Govt. officials and lawyers should not keep dancing girls as their concubines.
- 5) Widow marriages should be encouraged wholeheartedly.

In the early days Govt. officials who had no knowledge of English used to receive bribes. To avoid this, English knowing young men were

given jobs by the district collectors and judges. But the situation in no way improved and unfortunately there was a perceptible deterioration. It is not mere education that makes a man perfect. One's conduct is more important. It is the self- reformation that is required.

The suicide of a few Government Officers in protest against bribery might, of course, bring down the number of bribery cases. But as time passed, the evil practice was not only restored but also increased considerably.

Chilakamarti while condemning this practice, at one stage, pities the employee who receives the bribe. He offers an explanation also for the adverse circumstances of the employees.

“The real cause for an employee's stooping to bribery is but his miserable poverty. In those days the Englishman was paid a higher salary than the Indian as the former belonged to the ruling nation. If the salaries of the Indians were made equal to those of the Englishmen, the practice of bribery would have totally been eradicated. How can a clerk live without sufficient food for eating? It is difficult to stick to morals when one is poverty-stricken”.

These remarks were made by Chilakamarti in the year 1942. Almost half a century has now passed. All the British officers were replaced with the Indians. Salaries have been considerably increased. The price line has also correspondingly shot up. Have the conditions in any way improved? Is the evil practice of bribery eradicated? It is upto every individual to have self- introspection in this regard.

PROBLEMS PERTAINING TO WOMEN

Veeresalingam took pains to see that the dowry system in marriages was put an end to. Chilakamarti faithfully followed him. But no satisfactory result was achieved. Educated youngmen and their parents did not cooperate in solving the problem. The demand for dowry was spreading like an incurable epidemic. Selling of daughters to the rich old idiots for the purpose of marriage was the order of yesteryears. Now

selling of grooms for a very high dowry has replaced the old order. Both are equally bad. Chilakamarti along with Veeresalingam wrote a number of articles on this evil practice. How many families became poor by incurring debts to shell down dowries in cash to the grooms! The groom's party thinks that the bride's party is always subordinate to them and awfully illtreats the latter. Dacoits are much better than the groom's party because their operations are overt. The most surprising thing is that a rich father-in-law always goes in search of a rich son-in-law and makes him more rich; but never does he try to favour a poor boy and make him at least self-sufficient.

"Unless young men come forward with a spirit of sacrifice and enlightened outlook, conditions will never improve. The evil practice of dowry used to be prevalent in upper classes only. Now it has spread to other classes too".

Chilakamarti pours out his feelings in the most soul-stirring and heart-rending manner.

Are the present day conditions better? No, still worse.

The legislation prohibiting the dowry system is as helpless as the poor parents of a bride.

The only solution would be a change in the attitude of prospective grooms and their parents as also rich fathers-in-law going in search of only rich sons-in-law.

Women's education has, of course, considerably improved. But when it comes to the question of dowry, even educated young girls are not spared. The more the bride is educated, more qualified should be the groom and correspondingly the dowry payable to him also increases. If this is the state of affairs, how about the widow marriages?

When it becomes difficult to find a suitable match for young educated and employed woman how difficult it is to perform the marriage of a widow?

During the days of Veeresalingam they did it with a missionary zeal, opening widow-homes exclusively meant for them. How many widow marriages could they perform in those days despite so much of opposition from the orthodox community?

Do we hear of any widow marriage now-a-days?

Do we come to know of any society being specially dedicated to the cause of widows now-a-days?

Child marriages, of course, are totally prohibited. But if the bridegrooms do not insist on dowry for their marrying a child- bride, the child marriages, I doubt, may again increase in number. After all, it is money that works wonders in this society.

God forbid! Let no such situation arise now! Innumerable are the problems of women. It is men like Veeresalingam and Chilakamarti that should come to their rescue.

PROMOTION OF FINE ARTS AND LANGUAGE

Of all the fine arts, music is the most important and musicians from the South gained great popularity by virtue of their mastering *Kritis* composed by Tyagaraja. On any auspicious occasion like a marriage, great musicians from the South were invited. Chilakamarti used to wonder why our Telugu musicians were not frequently invited to South, despite Tyagaraja being a Telugu saint composer. Chilakamarti very much wished that our Telugu musicians should be invited to all places and that affluent people should be philanthropic and liberally contribute for the establishment of more music schools in this part of the country.

Similarly schools for imparting instruction in painting and sculpture also should be started. The architectural and sculptural beauty of the Indian temples is praiseworthy. A foreign visitor to this country is struck with wonder at the very first sight of our temple architecture. In this regard Chilakamarti remarks, probably mistakenly, that there is no worthmentioning sculpture in the Andhra area. This observation is not correct. The sculptures at Amaravati, Nagarjununikonda, Hanumakonda and a number of other places bear testimony to the architectural beauties of high order in the Andhra area.

In the field of dance and music also there has been remarkable progress in this area and the Telugu artists are exhibiting their skills not only in India but also abroad as desired by Chilakamarti.

The Language Issue: Regarding the Language, Chilakamarti has definite ideas and strong convictions. In Telugu, the spoken tongue is different from that of the text book language. The former is called

Vyavaharika and the latter is *Granthika*. The *Vyavaharika* is not governed by classical grammar rules framed for the *Granthika*. Gidugu Ramamurti and Gurazada Apparao upheld the argument that the *Vyavaharika* alone should be used in books also. Though Chilakamarti had great respect for them, he could not agree with their argument of the *Vyavaharika* usage. He totally condemned the usage of this language by the followers of Gidugu. In support of his argument, he quotes the language of Vemana in verses and the prose works of Veeresalingam written in a very simple and easily understandable style. Chilakamarti approved of this kind of simple *Granthika* language but not the *Vyavaharika* and the colloquial slang forms of Telugu.

Despite Chilakamarti's strong conviction, 'which was pure in thought, word and deed, in the matter of usage of *Granthika* language', the *Vyavaharika* and colloquial form of Telugu alone prospered during the last five decades since most of the modern Telugu writers, journals, periodicals, daily newspapers and cinemas preferred the use of only the spoken language.

In fact, Chilakamarti's *Granthika* language was not too dogmatic like that of *Prabandha Poets* of the middle ages. He used the simplest and most lucid form so that it might appeal to all classes of readers such as laymen of average intelligence as well as erudite scholars. The resultant effect was that his language was very close to the speech of every day life. The difference between his *Granthika* and others' *Vyavaharika* lies only in the case of endings (such as '*Pustakamu*' and '*Samtakamu*' instead of *Pustakam* and *Samtakam* and verb endings (such as *Chuchuta* and *Povuta* for *Chudatam* and *Povatam*).

Since Chilakamarti intended most of his works to be prescribed for school children, he preferred to write only in *The Granthika*. As his plays were intended to be witnessed by all regions of the Telugu country, he felt that the *Granthika* alone would do full justice to the upper classes as also the masses. And a surprising thing was that despite his language, his plays were more popular among the masses and illiterate, including the verses in them..

THE OPPRESSED CLASSES AND THE RELIGION

As a matter of fact, the uplift of the oppressed classes was one of the gigantic tasks facing India as their population was almost one sixth of

the total population of the country in the early forties of this century. Chilakamarti observed that their total number would be decreasing as they were being converted to Christianity or Islam. The reason was quite obvious. He observed-

“The so called upper classes treat the oppressed as untouchables, by getting done all kinds of mean jobs by them. Domestic animals and dogs are allowed to stay in our houses but not the panchamas. What a pity! As menial servants they can graze our cattle. But we should not touch them or talk to them. Are they not created by God by whom we are created? Do they not have hunger and thirst, pains and pleasures as we have?

There are very rich and wise people among us. We spend money for construction of choultries and for performing rituals. But never do we try to improve the conditions of the dwellings of Malas and Madigas (untouchables). Should they live only on the outskirts of the villages? How miserable the conditions of their huts are! Does not Krishna say in his Gita that a real scholar treats a cow, an elephant a dog, a mala and a brahmin alike? *Panditah Sana Darsinah*. What does it mean?

Like the rest of the country, the Andhra area also became interested in the problem of oppressed class. The Maharaja of Pithapuram established two hostels exclusively for Panchamas. For their maintenance and welfare he liberally provided food, clothes and education. The interest evinced by Veeresalingam and Raghupati Venkata Ratnam Naidu in this regard is praiseworthy. I am also equally interested in this problem. I made a humble attempt of starting the Ram Mohun School in 1909 exclusively for the uplift of the oppressed class. There are 150 students and 7 teachers in that school now (1942). Education is free there. I meet the expenses from the income I get, on my books. The Raja of Pithapuram contributed some money to this school. As I was left to find for myself, having spent three thousand rupees including

my energies, for a good length of time, I was constrained to leave it off for want of funds for its maintenance. No one else has started a school specially for the oppressed classes, before I started. Recently some board schools are being established for them here and there.

If rich people, instead of spending money for construction of temples and choultries, spend it for the uplift of the oppressed, the country and our nation, no doubt, would prosper in no time''.

By this, one should not presume that Chilakamarti had no reverence for God. His interest in the uplift of the oppressed was much more than what he evinced in God who is only abstract. It is necessary to say here a few words about his attitude towards religion.

He was very much interested in *Brahmo Samaj*, started by Raja Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal in 1828. The *Brahmos* believe in *Ekeswara* i.e., one God and the worship of only one God. It is in no way contrary to our religious tradition, established by *Upanishads* and *Vedanta* Philosophy. There can be no superstitious beliefs for a person following the tenets of *Brahmo Samaj*. Despite the keen interest evinced by social reformers like Veeresalingam and Sir Raghupati Venkata Ratnam Naidu, the *Brahmo Samaj* did not flourish in this part of the country as it did in Bengal.

Though the *Radha Swami Cult* was spreading in our country and the followers' efforts were praise-worthy, Chilakamarti had no faith in that cult. The *Arya Samaj* had little or no following in Andhra area and the Theosophical Society, Chilakamarti felt, was no religion at all.

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Religion, like politics, plays a major role in the life of our people. It can even be said that religion plays a more important role than politics. 'Politics' which is a science by itself has now become a synonym for bickerings and self-aggrandisement.

Chilakamarti regretted this trend very much thus:

“The main tenets of religions were always noble and lofty. The followers paved the way for differences among Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Brahmins, Non-Brahmins, oppressed classes and several others. Since thousands of years they were born here, brought up here, under the same sky, on the same sacred soil breathing the same air, drinking the same milk from the breast of their motherland. Is it not ruinous for their sacred Mother Land to hate one another?”

Who is Rama? Who is Viswamitra, the discernor of the Holy Hymn of *Gayatri*? Who is Veda Vyasa? Who are Pandavas? Who are the twelve Alvars? Are they all Brahmins? No; Most of them are non-Brahmins. Was not the mother of Veda Vyasa a fisherwoman? Do we not respect the *Vedas* compiled by sage Vyasa? Do we not adore *Brahma Sutras*, *Puranas*, *Maha Bharata*, *Bhagavata* and *Hari Vamsa* written by him?

Similarly, the Holy Works composed by the great souls of the other religions and other nations should be equally respected.

A sense of common brotherhood is the dire need of the day. A sense of feeling that the whole world is one family of which we are all members, should develop at the earliest. If every member of the family does his duty, the whole family would, no doubt, prosper. The country and the Nation also prosper. Is it not our duty to protect this sacred land of ours from the dangers of enmity and hatred within ourselves? Human beings blessed with the faculty of thinking and wisdom should behave like knowledgeable and wise people. If we beat and bite each other like wild animals and street dogs what is the difference between them and the human beings?

‘Unity in Diversity’ alone is the solution for all problems.

Let us, therefore, unite and live like human beings under the same canopy of this Happy Universe.”

Chilakamarti Lakshmi Narasimham concluded his autobiography with the above *Pious Words* in July 1942.

Do they not hold good for all times?

APPENDIX-I

LANDMARKS IN THE LIFE OF CHILAKAMARTI LAKSHMI NARASIMHAM

*	Birth:	26 September 1867
*	<i>Upanayanam</i> : Sacred thread ceremony..	1872
*	Admission into First standard In the Government school at Veeravasaram, the native village...	1878
*	Matriculation: Passed in the third chance at Rajahmundry ...	1887
*	Versification: Earliest verses written, but not in his own name ie as a ghost writer ...	1887
*	Appointment as Telugu pandit: Rendered free services to the Aryan School at Rajahmundry, started by his friends.....	1889
*	First play: <i>Keechaka Vadha</i>	1889
*	Starting of <i>Hindu Nataka Samajam</i> which staged Chilakamarti's plays ...	1889
*	Encomium as Local Shakespeare: By Sivanath Sastry of Bengal ...	1890
*	Performance of first <i>Ashtavadhana</i> : at Dhavaleswaram..	1891
*	Marriage with Venkayamma of Kakaraparru village in W.G. District	1893
*	Award of first prize for the novel, <i>Ramachandravijayam</i>	1894
*	Demise of his Father, Venkanna ...	1895
*	Award of first prize for the novel, <i>Hemalata</i>	1896

*	Award of first prize for the novel, <i>Ahalyabai</i>	1897
*	Starting of ' <i>Saraswati</i> ' Journal ...	1898
*	Starting of a school in which pupils were admitted upto IV class ...	1899
*	Starting of a Middle School ..	1902
*	Starting of a High School without Govt. recognition ...	1903
*	Attending dinner arranged in honour of Tangutur Prakasam on his return from abroad with Barrister Degree	1905
*	Starting of ' <i>Manorama</i> ' a literary monthly in which some of his works were published ..	1906
*	The coronation of Pithapuram Maharaja for which Chilakamarti along with Veereslingam was invited ...	1907
*	Arrival of Bepin Chandra Pal at Rajahmundry	1907
*	The middle school of Chilakamarti taken over by Veeresalingam who named it <i>Hitakarini</i> High School after opening Vth & VIth forms ..	1907
*	Starting of ' <i>Ramamohun Pathasala</i> ' exclusively for the oppressed classes ..	1909
*	Starting of ' <i>Desa Mata</i> ' Journal in which some of Chilakamarti's novels were published ..	1910
*	Starting of 'Night School' named <i>Vivekananda Pathasala</i> ..	1915
*	Participation in the Annual Celebration of <i>Krishnadevaraya Andhra Bhasha Granthalayam</i> at Hyderabad ..	1915
*	Interview with Ravindranath Tagore at Pithapuram ...	1918

- * Demise of Veeresalingam, the path-finder to
Chilakamarti in literary and social activities ... 27 May 1919
- * Presidentship of the Nationalists' *Sammana*
Sangham during the days of Non Cooperation
movement ... 1920
- * *Shashti poorti* of Chilakamarti ... 1927
- * Public meeting in connection with
Shashti poorti ... 1928
- * Demise of Venkayamma, his wife ... 13 June 1930
- * Unveiling of Chilakamarti's oil painting in the
Town Hall at Rajahmundry ... 1938
- * Honour of being taken in a big procession
at Kakaraparru (W.G.District)... 1942
- * Award of '*Kalaprapoorna*' Title by the
Andhra University ... 1943
- * Demise of Chilakamarti Lakshmi Narasimham ...
17 June 1946

APPENDIX-II

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